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Editorial

Dawn Darlaston-Jones
University of Notre Dame, Australia

This is the first issue of *ACP* for which I am officially the Editor. I have been in an acting role for the past three years and have been supported by a small but highly energetic editorial team comprising Anne Sibbel, Lauren Breen and Sharon McCarthy. The four of us look forward to taking ACP to the next level and to increasing circulation and readership nationally and internationally.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Lynne Cohen for her contribution as immediate past Editor. I recall as a postgraduate student watching Lynne and Neil Drew frantically trying to address and mail copies of *Network,* as it was called then, in between taking classes and conducting student consultation. This type of volunteerism characterises the people who actively keep the College of Community Psychologists alive in Australia in spite of difficult circumstances. Lynne has been involved in the College for many years serving as both National and WA State treasurer and currently has responsibility for course accreditation. On behalf of the entire College I would like to extend our gratitude to Lynne for the time and effort she has expended on the continued development of ACP and the College in general.

It is often only in turbulent times that we attempt to identify the 'glue' that holds individuals, groups, and communities together; or even to explore the concept of what constitutes *community*. There is also the perception that *real* community psychology requires engagement with a traditionally disadvantaged group. The papers in this issue examine some of these concepts and questions. The issue first explores the concept of *Sense of Community* (SOC): itself a highly contested yet widely used concept, before turning the lens onto higher education as a site of intervention.

The first paper by Pretty, Bishop, Fisher and Sonn is a position paper that seeks to establish the foundation of SOC in relation to its definition and scope and the editorial team would like to expressly invite comment on this. The term *community* has to some degree become something of a cliché in modern times and even within the CP community different writers employ notions of SOC in different ways, often linking it to place or neighbourhood to the exclusion of relational communities that defy place boundaries. The second paper by Fisher and Sonn expands the concept of SOC and relates it to issues of inclusion and exclusion. The third paper by Liang, Tracy, Glenn, Burns and Ting provides a different conceptualisation of community in the development of the Relational Health Index. Warland, Ziaian, Stewart, Proctor, Sawyer and Baghurst examine the challenges that researchers face when working with a vulnerable community: young Australians refugees.

The next group of papers examine notions of connection and support within higher education as a distinct community. In the first of these I discuss the different types of student and contest the traditional demographic categorisation that is often employed in research that examines student experience and retention. At this point I would like to extend my appreciation to Lauren Breen and Anne Sibbel for managing the review process on this paper to ensure the integrity and rigour of the Journal. Urquhart and Pooley pick up on a theme established in the preceding paper and examine the role of social support as a mediating factor for student success and finally an excellent paper by Hess and Larson outlines the processes employed in creating a genuinely student-centred teaching and learning context. We hope that you enjoy the papers presented in this issue and are motivated to provide commentary.

Address correspondence to
email: d.darlaston-jones@nd.edu.au

Psychological sense of community and its relevance to well-being and everyday life in Australia

Grace Pretty
The University of Southern Queensland
Brian Bishop
Curtin University of Technology
Adrian Fisher
Christopher Sonn
Victoria University

Sense of community is a concept that has considerable currency within a vast range of disciplines and practices. It serves as a criterion for the assessment of social capital; the generation of social policies; the development of social and geographical communities; and the evaluation of community capacity building. Community psychologists consider it central to their value-based praxis in promoting social justice and social change. However it is also employed as a common lay term to refer to feelings of belonging, identity and support. It occurs in public domain discourse such as reporting community response to disaster, promoting the value of a rural lifestyle, and advertising urban residential developments. For psychologists, and other professionals and policy makers, there is the real need to consider the processes that are inherent in living in a community, in providing services and interventions, in understanding processes of inclusion and exclusion, with resultant positive or negative impacts on mental and physical health. Because sense of community discourses are utilised for such diverse purposes, this paper is written for multiple constituencies with a view to encouraging and informing its use in collaborative efforts to develop and sustain healthy Australian communities. We present an overview of its multidisciplinary theoretical origins and the more recent empirical foundations of quantitative and qualitative assessment methods. We then suggest ways in which this theory and research informs and progresses several challenges within Australian community culture, from the broad context of health, to specific population subgroups including diverse cultures, immigrants and youth, and to specific issues such as natural resource management and building the social coalition for government sponsored program delivery. While providing a resource for researchers and practitioners, the paper also critically examines the work yet to be done to position sense of community as an empirically sound and culturally sensitive psychological construct.

Sense of community discourses and definitions

Psychologists use concepts that are clearly defined within professional and research discourses. However, sometimes these same concepts are used in everyday discourses with slight differences in meaning. It is challenging for psychologists to engage in such contexts where understandings and integration of meanings of psychological concepts need to occur. Sense of community is one such concept.

Sense of community is an idea and ideal that appears in the popular press, government policies, schools' mission statements, and other diverse places. However, sense of community has substantial theorising, research and practice in psychology and other discipline areas, even though there are still those who view it as a rather warm and fuzzy concept at best, or perhaps as an advertising slogan. For example, in the Domain Express section of The Age newspaper in Melbourne we saw such headlines as: "Sense of community emerges as drawcard of housing development living" (Welch, 2005, p. 24). These articles focused on a mix of urban design, social interaction and resource sharing, and children playing together as the important elements of community life. Here sense of community is used as a given, not requiring definition. Sense of community is seen as an unequivocally desirable state. It can promote the idea of nice people living near us, people like us with similar backgrounds, experiences and aspirations. This

commonsense idea of sense of community is derived from images of the past that are projected as idealised forms of living, in idealized types of community.

Even in psychology, social work, community development and sociology community is often seen as a buffer against the hard challenges people face. Community offers support and identity derived from those nearby or with whom there are meaningful ongoing interactions. These conceptualisations extend beyond just social support, and they are similar to such lay ideas that also focus on the positive aspects of community. However these conceptualisations do not recognise the actual psychological processes and outcomes inherent within the concept. Indeed, they often reflect a very static picture of sense of community, as an outcome to be desired and achieved. For psychologists, and other professionals and policy makers, there is a need to consider the processes that are inherent in living in a community; in providing services and interventions, in understanding processes of inclusion and exclusion, with resultant positive, or negative impacts on mental and physical health.

While sense of community can facilitate desired outcomes, or provide buffers against significant challenges, it can also serve negative ends. Hugh McKay (2005) has indicated ways in which Australian society has turned inwards as the threat of terrorism and international turmoil is publicised. This produces a protective approach in which we move more and more to the familiar and act to construct community such that it excludes those people and things that are different. In the broad debate on immigration and political change in Australia, Fisher and Sonn (2002) discussed the ways in which calls to icons, images and ideals could be used to reinforce the 'real' Australian identity and show who are the 'others'. This discourse continues with the dehumanising of the 'others' in detention centres, and political rhetoric over refugees and asylum seekers. Hence while sense of community is a crucial aspect to well-being and mental health promotions, it is only a part of the story. It is also important to understand negative aspects of sense of community; aspects that promote division and negative mental health states for those who may be excluded from the benefits of community membership and resources.

While we must contend with multiple concepts of sense of community, we must also understand concepts with similarly diverse meanings that are proffered as inherent dimensions of sense of community and become part of its discourse. For example, the term 'empowerment' has, at times, been captured by policy makers to gloss over substantiated inequities in society without recognition of the power and impact that having a sense of one's community has in people's lives. Similarly, social capital is identified as integral to sustaining a community as are social cohesion, and community capacity building. A sense of one's community can also be understood in relation to attachment to and sense of the geographical place in which the community is located.

Because sense of community discourses are utilised for such diverse purposes, this paper is written for multiple constituencies: community theorists, consulting psychologists, social activists and lobbyists, and those who drive the political and policy agendas related to community well-being. Often disparate from each other, we believe collaborative efforts to understand and sustain diverse Australian communities could be enhanced with a common reference point. The inclusion of sense of community and its associated dimensions as process and desired outcome within such collaborative work is both empirically and socially defensible. In this paper we address issues pertaining to each constituency; we present an historical overview of sense of community, reviewing its theory and assessment, and then explore ways in which it can be used in psychology to help promote people's health and well-being.

An historical snapshot of sense of community

Within psychology, sense of community has not been positioned as a key factor in understanding or changing human behaviour. The extent to which it has been deeply conceptualised and implemented is still limited when compared to other psychological constructs. To support our position that sense of community has a sound conceptual foundation we present an overview of decades of thought, debate and action that

underpin its current theoretical and operational definitions. We begin with consideration of the word 'community'.

Fifty years ago Hillery (1955) documented 94 descriptive definitions of community. Generally the term is used to describe social organisations, both formal and informal, that are bounded by a physical or geographical location (neighbourhood, school), or are constituted on the basis of common interests, goals or needs (sporting, hobby or political groups), or in the case of Aboriginal peoples, a network of kin. The term community describes a specialised branch of psychology as well as the conceptual heart of its paradigms and practice.

Current ideas of how one has a sense of one's community have evolved from a rich multidisciplinary ancestry situated in socio-political as well as theoretical domains. Much of the current literature makes reference to the conceptualisation by Tönnies (1887/1955) when he made his distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (sometimes thought of as the village or small town with strong kin and friendship linkages), and *Gesselschaft* (the impersonal city). Tönnies (1887/1955) expressed concern and dissatisfaction with changes in social structures. He argued that *Gemeinschaft* was being superseded by *Gesellschaft*. The supportive interdependence, mutual responsibility and common goals of village and town life were being lost to the highly differentiated and individualistic nature of larger scaled structures of *Gesellschaft*. Durkheim's later work (1964) continued to explore this erosion of cohesiveness and collective consciousness, particularly due to the formation of community around interests rather than locality. On the one hand rural sociologists wrote about the demise of the unconscious process of sense of community which was "…closely woven in to the fabric of tradition and morality as to be scarcely more noticeable than the air men breathe" (Nisbet, 1962, p. 57), but others were critical of undue nostalgia for the village life, and turned to neighbourhoods as the new site for community (Warren, 1963). More recently, in urban design and new housing estates, New Urbanists are again focussing on the small scale.

Research demonstrates that the phrase 'sense of community' resonates with members of different kinds of communities, including the "layers" of a residential community (Brodsky & Marx, 2001), interest groups and virtual communities (Obst, Zinkiewicz & Smith, 2002). Also, at any one time most people are members of several communities identified in terms of nationality, gender, politics, religion, etc. At different times each community has different salience, with one being the primary community on which people draw at times of significant challenge (Fisher & Sonn, 1999). Indeed the role of community in sustaining well-being has been the focus of much psychology of community research.

Environmental and ecological theories of human behaviour gave psychologists a position from which to argue the relevance of community to individual and group well-being. Research in social environments, social group cohesion and identity, and social networks provided a window into the contexts within which individual behaviour was played out. Lewin (1951) proposed that $B = f(P, E)$, that is behaviour is a function of the person, the environment and the interaction between the two. To fully understand behaviour, Kelly (1966) proposed we think of relationships among persons, their social *and* physical environments. For Barker (1968) the physical locale was the behavioural context in which the nature of the physical setting itself (e.g., schools, therapeutic communities, neighbourhoods), defined and moderated behaviour. Ecological perspectives maintained the physical characteristics of behavioural contexts do not exist independently of the place where the behaviour occurs. The place itself can alter positively or negatively the cognitions, affect and behaviour of its inhabitants (see Heft, 2001). These ideas would later inform an understanding of community as geographical as well as social place (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983).

It was during this time of reconsidering the role of context in psychological well-being, that the residential community was introduced as a site and a source for mental health consultation. Consultation models proposed interventions for the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This orientation toward community within the mental health field brought a renewed interest and

inquiry into characteristics of community life.

The socio-political momentum around concern for the demise of the *Gemeinschaft*, the inclusion of person-environment interaction in paradigms to explore human behaviour, and the growing conviction that community prevention was better than individual intervention, influenced Sarason's (1974) belief that sense of community was paramount to quality of life and well-being. Sarason (1974), in his seminal work on sense of community, described it as the feeling that one is part of a readily available, supportive and dependable structure, **that is part of everyday life** and not just when disasters strike. He warned it may be difficult to bring the concept into the theoretical and empirical traditions of mainstream psychology because:

> the concept "psychological sense of community" is not a familiar one in psychology...it does not sound precise, it obviously reflects a value judgment, and does not sound compatible with "hard" science. It is a phrase which is associated in the minds of many psychologists with a kind of maudlin togetherness, a tear-soaked emotional drippiness that misguided do-gooders seek to experience (pp. 156-157).

Yet, he maintained, people knew when they had it and when they didn't.

Inherent in this psychological construction of sense of community is the interdependence, mutual responsibility and collective consciousness notions of theorists such as Nisbet and Durkheim. When Sarason (1982) argued that the building of US highways was a considerable threat to its citizens' sense of community and psychological wellbeing, he was echoing Tönnies concerns about the destruction of *Gemeinschaft*. He argued that the state can create segregation of various groups of people, such as the mentally ill, disabled or deviant. *Gesellschaft* thinking leads to increased alienation of these people and a reduction of any sense of community they had.

Sense of community is considered to transcend individualism and is distinctive from individual-level constructs such as social support. It is an extra-individual construct. Communities of people have a role as a whole system in supportive transactions (Felton & Shinn, 1992) within which notions about communal efficacy and social capital are generated. Well functioning communities are supportive, even though one may not have personal relationships with each individual member. Furthermore, members may continue to have a sense of community even though individuals come and go. Hence, sense of community can be an illusive cognition and affect which is not necessarily based on experiencing individual-level transactions. More recently research has sought to understand these psychological processes in terms of social identity theory (Obst, Zinkiewicz & Smith, 2002). As Sarason suggests, we have a "feeling" that the community and all that it holds is available to us, though we may never ask for its resources.

Since community, and dimensions associated with it, were identified as a source of prevention and intervention consultation, efforts to define, assess and develop sense of community have been ongoing. Our account of this work to date is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather it highlights conceptual and methodological issues facing practitioners when representing sense of community as a process in program consultation and as an outcome in program evaluation.

Assessing sense of community

Considerable research has explored sense of community over the last two decades. Summaries of this work are found in several special issues of the *Journal of Community Psychology*, and in an Australian edited book *Psychological Sense of Community: Research, Applications and Implications (*Fisher, Sonn & Bishop, 2002). Many definitions have developed (Buckner, 1988; Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Doolittle & MacDonald, 1978; Glynn, 1981; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Nasar & Julian, 1995; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981).

Perhaps the most accepted model of sense of community was introduced by McMillan and Chavis (1986) which includes many of the sociological and political ideals described earlier. Components include *membership*, feelings of emotional safety with a sense of belonging and identification; *influence*, exertion of one's

influence on the community with reciprocal influence of the community on oneself; *integration and fulfillment of needs*, physical and psychological needs met thereby reinforcing one to behave in a manner acceptable to the community; and *shared emotional connection*, positive affect related to community membership. This model has retained its prominence partly because a measure of sense of community, the Sense of Community Index (SCI: Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman & Chavis, 1990; Long & Perkins, 2003) was developed on the basis of it.

Generally, assessments of sense of community include observations and experiences of one's inclusion, participation and belonging and commitment within an identified community. Several questionnaires have been developed for use within survey methodologies. Most of these are for residential community research and consultation (Buckner, 1988; Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Glynn, 1986; Obst et al., 2002; Puddifoot, 2003), and can explore sense of community at various levels or layers of structure (Brodsky & Marx, 2001). Others are constructed for settings such as work (Klein & D'Aunno, 1986; Royal & Rossi, 1996) and education settings (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Lounsbury & DeNeui 1996). While some researchers have cautioned making assumptions about similarities between geographical and relational communities (Hill, 1996), other researchers have demonstrated similarities between diverse communities, such as residential neighbourhoods and virtual communities of science fiction fan clubs (Obst, Smith & Zinkiewicz, 2002).

There are limitations to these questionnaires and survey techniques in terms of the external and conceptual validity of the data they generate. Whichever measure is used, interpretation of participants' responses is restricted by the lack of norms for sense of community data. It is difficult to determine whether a score is a "good" or a "bad" value. As such, many researchers use measures of sense of community in conjunction with other scales that have normative data, for example, the General Health Questionnaire. Other researchers and practitioners measure sense of community at the beginning and end of interventions, with an increased score considered a positive outcome. Another problem arises when the question of

multiple communities is indicated. While the researcher may attempt to gather data about the importance of a target community, that community may not have salience for the participants at that time. For example, if we want to gather sense of community data in a school, students who are disengaged may find it has salience. Outcome data showing low scores do not mean that they necessarily have no sense of community, and gain no benefits from the school. It may mean that at that time the participants gain more support and identity from other communities to which they belong.

An alternative approach to assessing sense of community was taken in a project involving a number of rural towns in Victoria (Coakes, Fenton & Gabriel, 1999). They used the reparatory grid, a quantitative, phenomenological approach originally developed by Kelly (1955). This involved communities selecting their own constructs for analysis, and residents' ratings being interpreted based on these elements.

As the field of community psychology works toward more substance in building community theory, discussions continue around empirical evidence of sense of community. Debates consider how it is best assessed, whether by using quantitative methods (Chavis & Pretty, 1999) or more culturally sensitive and less disenfranchising qualitative methods (Bishop & Vicary, 2003).

A feature of much of this research is that it is based on an underlying assumption that sense of community as a desired state, is an outcome variable. But there are other ways of conceptualising it, which suggest the use of other research methods:

> For many, sense of community is seen as some type of end state, a positive in and of itself. Others see it as a predictor of other positive, or negative, outcomes. That is, we need a sense of community to achieve a series of benefits. Still another way of understanding sense of community is as a process in which the members interact, draw identity, social support, and make their own contributions to

the common good. (Bess, Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002, p. 6)

Those assessing sense of community must recognise the level and type of community that is being considered. A basic distinction can be made between geographical (place based), and relational (social interaction based) communities. That is, assessments must be conceptually valid in order to assess a localised geographic community (e.g., a town, neighbourhood), or some other type of geographical community (state, nation), or to assess a relational community and the interactions reflected in those communities.

To understand the nature, processes and experience of sense of community at any one time for a particular community it is necessary to have some appreciation of the community's history. It is difficult to capture this history from quantitative surveys. "[A] community has a distinctive history that, although it may not seem relevant in a psychological sense, is crucial to understanding some of its present qualities and social, political, religious, or economic characteristics. A community has changed, is changing, and will change again" (Sarason, 1974, p. 131). Alternative interview methods that invite people to tell stories about the life and experiences of their community can uncover rich data. Furthermore, these data have all the hallmarks of the philosophy and values of community psychology in that they are context specific and culturally sensitive without the presumptions or interpretations of the researcher, often implicit in forced-choice measures (Rappaport, 2000).

Much is being written about qualitative methodology in terms of its underlying implicit and distinct way of thinking about research and the rigour of its techniques (see Banyard & Miller, 1998), as well as the reciprocal benefits of its use with quantitative methods (Langhout, 2003). Narrative methods are one qualitative alternative that 'gives voice' to community members. Information can be gathered explicitly about the experience of sense of community and the processes that underlie a specific community. The spectrum of qualitative methods used to investigate sense of community includes structured interview and focus group formats

(e.g., Brodsky, 1996; Dunham , Hurshman, Litwin, Gusells, Ellsworth, & Dodd, 1998; Henry, 1997; Scourfield, Evans, Shah & Beynon, 2002). More recently photovoice methods have further expanded our ability to "hear" from people with language and developmental difficulties (see Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell & Pestronk, 2004). Participants are invited to take photographs of images that portray every day life in their community.

However these methods are also not without their critics (e.g., Rapley & Pretty, 1999). Indeed the theoretical debates regarding the affective, cognitive, behavioural, and spiritual aspects of sense of community (McMillan, 1996) are surpassed in intensity only by similar debates regarding how to capture the nature of this construct through an assessment approach (Bishop & Vicary, 2003). These revolve around some unresolved issues in measurement where individual differences methods fail to deal with people with significant alienation and a corresponding lack of sense of community. While qualitative methods can address the issue of a substantial lack of sense of community, they do not allow for generalisation of outcomes.

While there may be debate about the appropriateness and adequacy of methods to assess sense of community, there are some general principles that guide the utility of specific methods. If the data are to be used for policy advice and formulation, it is often preferable to have quantitative data, especially where this can be linked or triangulated with other relevant data sources. If the aim of the data gathering is community building, then a number of the qualitative approaches (including participatory action research, photovoice, and narrative enquiry) may be more useful.

In the previous sections, we have laid out some of the theoretical and research issues in sense of community. The aim of this was to demonstrate the shift from lay conceptualisations and usage to the substantive bases in psychology. We now move to ways in which the theory and research can be seen as operating within a range of specific contexts, from the broad context of health, to specific sub-groups such as immigrants and youth. From these, samples of actions and interventions can be derived.

Community and health

Research indicates that sense of community and related factors have significant positive impacts on a range of outcomes for individuals and groups (Davidson & Cotter, 1991). Conversely, a lack of connections, identity and supports inherent in sense of community may lead to less positive outcomes.

Social epidemiologists have demonstrated how community connections, belonging, networks, cohesion, and social capital play a significant role in the health, well-being, and mental health outcomes of populations and sub-groups. Syme (2000) has shown that traditional epidemiological risk factors account for only about 40% of the variance when studying cardiovascular mortality and morbidity. Hence, 60% of the variance has yet to be accounted for, and much of this relates to the social determinants that can be understood in terms of sense of community.

Extending these ideas, Berkman and Glass (2000), and Kawachi and Berkman (2000) place the contexts of networks, social cohesion, and particularly social engagement and control, as crucial to the promotion of community level health and well-being. Essentially, they show that sense of community and social capital can play a significant part in people's lives. These factors may even help to keep many people alive. The ways that neighbourhood social processes can mediate and moderate community-level socioeconomic disadvantage, and health problems related to it, have been well documented (Browning & Cagney, 2003). The key elements identified across this research are meaningful social contact and positive social cohesion. Without these, the person and the group flounder.

Research by Scuderi (2005) has drawn upon this in the examination of a group of cardiac rehabilitation patients who are immigrants from Italy. His analyses demonstrated that the traditional model of rehabilitation focusing on education, diet and exercise was far from the most effective aspect of the program. Participants reported that the social contact with those who spoke the same language and who had shared similar experiences and histories were paramount. Added to this, meaningful roles and activities inside and outside the family were even more important. Similarly, Lee and Cubin (2002) identified relationships between neighbourhood factors and cardiovascular health behaviours in young people.

This research follows a basic tenet of community psychology, the need to understand the multiple levels at which a problem can be analysed, and the multiple levels at which interventions can take place. Where a traditional focus is placed on individual level interventions and individual outcomes, it is possible to miss the significance of the context in which the individual and group are functioning.

An interesting part of the work of the social epidemiologists is that they draw on the 19th Century work of Durkheim as described earlier. The focus here is on the profound impact that type of community had on suicide rates, and what we now can learn from this about community engagement, and of valuing community members.

In summary, the role of belonging to a defined community allows members a freedom to express their identity and roots, their emotions and shared history within a safe context. They are able to hold valued positions within a community, and relate positively to others who have similar histories and experiences. Beyond social support (itself a major positive factor for many with health issues) the sense of community provides a buffer against physical and psychological symptoms of illness, and facilitates adjustment. Indeed recognition of the capacity of a community to address many of its members' needs has become formalised as the basis for a political policy of building a "social coalition" to address many health and social issues in Australia.

Building the 'social coalition'; sense of community in policy

While there is some thought that sense of community is an ideal, some policy developments at the federal level suggest we may need to think of it as vital in sustaining many government support programs. In 2000 the Australian government launched a policy of addressing community health and social issues through the development of a 'social coalition'. This involves a partnership between the Australian people and all levels of government in

new initiatives to address social issues (Australian, January 2000).

The thrust of this policy change was the engagement of business, non-profit community organisations and individual volunteers with government agencies to promote outcomes through the sharing of resources and expertise. This was not to suggest a shift in how Australians have taken care of and supported each other.

Much of Australia's everyday activity is possible because of the volunteer non-profit sector of our culture, from assistance in homeless shelters to the sport and recreation for all ages. As Warburton and Oppenheimer (2000) describe, "volunteering and volunteer work have been part of the social and economic fabric of Australian society since the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788" (p 2). However, volunteering has been underestimated and undervalued. More importantly, at a time when programs sustaining aspects of our quality of life may become more dependent on the commitment of volunteers, the numbers of volunteers are dropping. If psychology as a discipline is to contribute understanding and solutions to this issue, we will need more substantial theory and research to inform the development and sustenance of the social coalition.

While much has been written about volunteerism from the perspectives of individual differences in altruism, helping behaviour and prosocial action, the role of community context is also emerging as an important aspect. The extent of social coalitions being sought by government policy will require sustaining communities of volunteers over a long period of time. It will involve maintaining commitment amongst people who do not necessarily have personal bonds or a sense of obligation between each other. It will require a sense of community.

A growing body of literature is suggesting that it is essential to understand the community context shared by volunteers and recipients of their assistance as this will uncover the components of cooperation and caring in our society. In this regard, Omoto and Snyder (2002) demonstrated how sense of community encourages and maintains people's connection and responsibility toward each other when they are not personally acquainted. Davidson and

Cotter (1989) found citizen participation in various political activities was significantly related to sense of community, and that this sense could be a catalyst for engaging in community development activities. In an extensive study in New York City, Perkins and his colleagues (Perkins et al., 1990) found participation in residential block associations to be associated with high levels of sense of community.

Sense of community seems to provide the basis for what Iscoe called the 'competent community' (Cottrell, 1976; Iscoe, 1974). It generates communal efficacy (we can do together what we cannot accomplish on our own), responsibility and concern for social justice amongst its inhabitants. This is an important motivational aspect that keeps the social coalition and the social justice agenda progressing through economically and socially demanding times. An exceptional example of this within a poor Venezuelan barrio (Garcia, Giuliani and Wiesenfeld, 1999) shows how grassroots determination built not only the bricks and mortar of the physical community, but also the psychological sense of this community against all economic and social odds. Similarly, in some of Australia's most economically and socially disadvantaged suburbs, residents' sense of community has mediated the lack of consequences of crime, child abuse and poor physical and mental health (Vinson, 2004). Findings suggest that a socially cohesive structure can offset the need for extensive individual financial support. When there is a sense of community any individual support generates much common good; "the social whole is worth more than the sum of its parts" (Cuthill, 2002, p. 190). Studies such as these lend further credence to those who argue that economic well-being will not automatically result in social and community well-being (Cox, 2000).

A further example of the naturally occurring social coalition within Australian communities was uncovered by researchers who were investigating possible social impacts of changes to Federal Government forestry policy (Coakes & Fenton, 2001). As part of the social assessment process, measures of social vulnerability and community vulnerability were developed. One of the factors found to be related to social vulnerability was the history of

responses to social upheavals in the past. It appeared that exposure to past dramatic social and/or economic change led to communities' abilities to resist and survive change. It seemed that past exposure to change created a sense of the importance of community which in turn allowed a community to more effectively deal with imposed change.

We are hopeful that the evolution of the social coalition from a community's history may balance imposed political will for prospective economic advantage, with community will to maintain its identity and quality of life. It is further encouraging that assessment of community vulnerability is considered in decision making processes, and we maintain that sense of community is one of the more significant indicators of resilience and adaptability to change.

Sense of community and place

The sense that one has of one's community is not totally dependent on the social environment. The geographical location, or place, including its natural and built environments (e.g., Green, 1999; Kim & Kaplan, 2004) can contribute to the affect, cognitions and behaviour defining the 'sense' of one's community. This develops as a result of social interactions between people within specific places, such as the memorial ceremonies held at sites of historical significance, and between people and places, such as the protests to stop land clearing (Fried, 2000; Gustafson, 2000). Indeed research has demonstrated that the physical characteristics of the built environment can facilitate the development of sense of community (Plas & Lewis, 1996). Urban planners promise this experience may be produced by designs that foster informal social contact between neighbours (e.g., Hillier, 2002; Kuo, Sullivan, Coley & Brunson, 1998; Talen, 2000) and reconstitute the neighbourhood as an important element in developing one's sense of community (Farrell, Audry & Coulombe, 2004; Glynn, 1986). However, as Hillier (2002) points out in her observations on the efforts of planners in Western Australia to 'create community', the real meaning of these designer communities are not always so obvious to the residents. Furthermore, work by Brodsky (1996) suggests that not all cohesive neighbourhoods instil a

desire to belong or be associated with it. Within communities identified as 'risky' for children, some residents purposefully resist developing a sense of community. Brodsky suggest that such a negative sense of community may be adaptive where neighbourhoods are considered to be more a threat than a resource. Her work also raises socioeconomic issues related to sense of community, such as home ownership and length of residence (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Coakes & Bishop, 2002; Robinson & Wilkinson, 1995). These factors become of interest and concern when considering settlement issues of immigrants to Australia and migrant workers, to be discussed later in this paper.

Other researchers assessing physical environment have considered the population of community to be relevant to sense of community (Prezza & Costantini, 1998). However, findings have come to support the position of Freudenberg (1986) who concluded that these relationships were attenuated by the accessibility of primary social supports, which he argued may be available in a town of any size. Some sense of community researchers concur with Freudenberg. Even within larger, more densely populated urban communities, the boundaries of community expand or contract to be inclusive of those with similar interests, needs and resources in both geographical and relational communities (Brodsky & Marx, 2001).

Of particular interest to the Australian context is how research related to size and location of community has come to inform social, environmental and economic issues associated with rural and remote Australia. Approximately 20% of Australians live in rural areas while about 70% live within the district of a capital city (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). This means that conversations about equity of services for those taxpayers living 'in the bush' are also about rights of the minority, further complicated by positioning rural dwellers as having chosen to live in disparate regions of the country.

Social and geographical divisions between country and town are, however, becoming less clear (Lockie & Bourke, 2001). Those who leave the towns to seek inexpensive retirement options and lifestyle changes complicate the identity of the rural community and the social meaning of its geopolitical space

(Brown, 2002). The development of community identity in the new rural 'melting pot' will be an important issue in developing and sustaining the "social coalition" in rural areas.

Indeed it is in matters of place and environment that political struggles between rural and urban inhabitants are most evident around issues of managing natural resources. The National Landcare Program initiated in 1989 is one example of a social coalition approach to community problem solving. It has been heralded as a success story of government supported community action through networks of small volunteer groups (Curtis, Britton & Sobels, 1999). The Landcare and the National Heritage Trust (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998) were established to motivate and provide Australians with opportunities to learn about biodiversity and conservation. Through community development activities centred around social interaction with colleagues and neighbours (Millar & Curtis, 1997) projects were organised that aimed at preserving and reclaiming waterways, forests and grasslands. The central tenet of the Landcare movement was that residents should be the people setting priorities for natural resource management in their localities. Furthermore, supported by government-funded technologists, communities could directly affect their natural resource destiny.

Consistent with Kim and Kaplan (2004) and Green (1999), Landcare is based on the interaction of the social aspects of community and the natural resources that are inherent in the local areas. It is understood in terms of concerted community action to meet the significant physical environmental challenges of salinity and soil degradation. In this way, both the physical environment and the sense of community of participants are improved.

While there have been many documented successes from this program (Lockie, 2000), there has been growing criticism regarding the actual attitudinal, behavioural and technological changes of community members (Curtis, 2000). This had led to consideration of the psychology of the community in addition to those factors related to the willingness of residents to volunteer. Pretty, Bramston and Zammit (2004) demonstrated a

significant link between Landcare volunteers' identity and attachment with their Queensland communities and their motivation to participate. This suggests that the sense one has of one's community is related to their intention and behaviour to protect and restore the ecology of that place. This further suggests that development of a town's sense of community, or regeneration of a town's awareness of this sense, may be a first step in promoting the natural resource management agenda.

This research points to the importance of attending to the complex relationship between community and place in terms of building the social coalition for care and maintenance of the social and natural resources of rural and remote Australia.

Sense of community and diversity

Thomas (2004) highlighted Australia's diversity, stating that people who live here come from 232 different countries, that we speak 193 different languages, and that indigenous people have lived here for thousands of years. To immigrate, people leave their home countries voluntarily in search of employment or a better future for their children while adjusting to the new country. The geographical, social and cultural issues of having a sense of community are critical in understanding the stories of success and failure amongst those trying to make Australia their new home.

There are also challenges for the receiving community that flows from intercultural and intergroup relations. There are concerns for the existing identity and sense of community on which this is based (Fisher & Sonn, 2002). How these are played out and the extent to which Australia is an accepting or rejecting community can have significant impacts on the social and psychological functioning of both the newcomers and existing population.

Creating settings for belonging

Much research has explored the challenges of and responses to intergroup relations using the notion of acculturation. Acculturation refers to the social and psychological changes to individuals and groups that result because of continuous first hand contact between groups (Berry, 1997). Many have reported the stressful nature of acculturation and immigrant adaptation, and the negative social

and psychological health outcomes that may follow (Berry).

The sense of community model (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) has been used to explore the issues of identity and community from the perspective of immigrant groups and the role of sense of community in the settlement process (e.g., Fijac & Sonn, 2004; Sonn & Fisher, 1996, 1998, 2005; Sonn, 2002). Participants reported the importance of ethnic social settings which link members with broader social structures and provide contexts for developing skills and renegotiating social identities. Shared emotional connection, shared history and experience, and a shared country of origin are central to sense of community for different immigrant groups. Sonn and Fisher (1996) found in research with South African immigrants in Australia that many emphasised maintaining traditions, feeling comfortable with other South Africans, and developing networks with other South Africans. These aspects indicated a sense of familiarity and shared history that was important to remaking identities and community in the Australian context. Importantly, sense of community in that study was related positively to wellbeing as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988).

For Chilean immigrants to Western Australia, common symbols (e.g., language) and shared cultural values (e.g., Familialism) were important aspects of belonging and identification and central to members' participation in settings (see Sonn, 2002). A complex number of factors influenced identity and community for second-generation Pakistani-Muslim women in Western Australia (Fijac & Sonn, 2004). Among other findings they reported that religious affiliation (Islamic Law) was central to belonging and identification and it was often family and their extended community that understood and affirmed these identities.

Common symbols and histories can also become the basis for exclusion. The Pakistani women revealed that markers that served as a source of strength and identity (e.g, the veil) can be the basis for discrimination and racism. Racism and discrimination was particularly evidenced in the desecration of buildings of

religious significance in the period following September 11 (Fijac & Sonn, 2004). Aspects of a community were highlighted and used as a dimension for exclusion. This is not the only example where features of communities have been mobilised for exclusionary purposes. In recent times in Australia there has been considerable discussion about the ostensibly exclusionary nature of government responses to refugees and asylum seekers.

The threat of difference

There are different explanations and levels of analysis including those who emphasise levels of racism and the racialisation and 'othering' of ethnic groups (see Hage, 1998). Some have commented about the responses of 'so-called' mainstream Australians to refugees (e.g., Hage, 1998; Pettman, 1992; Vasta, 2000). These authors highlight the growing exclusionary responses and cultural racism that is visible in media representations of Aboriginal people and refugees. Hage argued that there are deeper fantasies of a white Australia rooted in the past that persists and is reflected in 'white' Australian responses to a rapidly changing community.

Fisher and Sonn (2002) used sense of community with a focus on values and symbols to explore how host communities respond to change. This orientation allowed for a different consideration of host community responses to perceived threats to valued symbols. By using this orientation to understand sense of community, it can be argued that the locking up of different groups of refugees in detention centres reflects an extreme response to a perceived threat. The response involves the creation of rigid boundaries that serve to define who can belong and who can't belong to the broader Australian community. The exclusion and detention of asylum seekers has detrimental effects on the wellbeing of those placed in detention centres, while for some sectors of the host community it provides an increased perception of safety. This increased perception of safety is often reflected in statements that justify the detention of groups of people because, as a person suggested, it only takes one "who is a prospective terrorist, who is going to do what they did in New York" (SBS, Insight, 2005).

The sense of community framework is powerful and has allowed us to understand better

the complex process of settlement-adaptation and the central role of internalised cultural and social resources in this process of change. We have been able to look beyond the individual psychological experience of acculturation to the more dynamic process of community and identity making that is part of intergroup relations. Apart from focusing on those who are settling, we have included exploring the responses of the host community, typically the dominant ethnic group.

Indigenous Australians

As with different immigrant communities, issues of community, identity and wellbeing need to be understood in the context of relations of dominance and subjugation. Unlike immigrants, however, Indigenous people have always lived here and continue to experience oppression and colonisation in their own country. Moreton-Robinson (2003) has highlighted the importance of this in stating that:

> Indigenous people's sense of home and place are configured differently to that of migrants. There is no other homeland that provides a point of origin, or place for multiple identities. Instead our rendering of place, home and country through our ontological relation to country is the basis for our ownership. (p. 37)

Although there is very little research that has directly applied to a sense of community framework in relation to the experiences of Indigenous Australians, there is writing that have explored the political nature of the term community and how it has been used in the oppression of Indigenous Australians (Dudgeon, Mallard, Oxenham, Fielder, 2002). The term has been reconstructed and imbued with local meanings and ways of being and relating that is informed by the lived experiences of indigenous peoples (Dudgeon et al.). This work is among the literature that points to the relevance of the notion for promoting change and enhancing individual and community wellbeing and liberation.

Some of us (Sonn & Fisher, 2004) have argued that communities that have been excluded and oppressed do not always capitulate and find ways to protect cultural resources that are central to community and identity. These cultural resources are protected and hidden in alternative spaces away from dominant groups and can form the basis for identity in changed circumstances. Glover, Dudgeon and Huygens (2005) wrote that cultural renaissance involves "celebrating survival, taking pride and joy in culture and identity and revitalizing language and cultural practices" (p. 333). For example, Jackamarra and Thorne (1997) have shown that ceremonial sites are of prime spiritual and cultural significance for indigenous people and at the core of identity and community making processes. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report (1997) into the removal of children from their families has shown the devastating effects of oppressive policies on the wellbeing of Indigenous people. This points to the importance of connection to country, reclaiming of language and articulation of indigenous ways of knowing and being as central to resilience, affirmation of identities, and self-determination.

Research shows that children of the stolen generation had significantly more mental health problems than those whose parents had not been removed from their parents (Zubrick et al., 2005). Zubrick et al. also found that the mental health of Aboriginal children was worse in regional centres, like Perth and Geraldton, than in more remote regions where the Aboriginal communities are living more traditional lives. One reason for these differences could be that the children in the more remote communities have that everyday sense of support and belonging (Sarason, 1974) afforded by traditional community and kinship structures

In relation to Aboriginal schooling, Sarra (2005) has argued for the need to disrupt white Australia's inaccurate perceptions of Aboriginal people and to anchor 'liberatory' activity in the positive perceptions of Aboriginality that is based in Aboriginal histories and lived experiences. The cultural resources that inform the positive perceptions include connection to land, spirituality, and respect for elders. These form the basis for the development of systems and strategies at schools aimed at reinforcing positive Aboriginal identity.

Youth in community

Margaret Mead wrote about the essential role of residential communities in the social development of young people, "The neighborhood is the place where children are brought up to become members of their own society. Inevitably, within a neighborhood children …learn how to adapt themselves to the kind of society into which they are growing" (Mead, 1984, p. 3). Research has shown further that sense of community is related to many aspects of adolescents' well-being (Pretty, Andrewes & Collett, 1994; Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler & Williams, 1996).

More recently large-scale studies demonstrate the significant relationships between neighbourhood characteristics and positive outcomes for young people. These include macro-level factors of socioeconomics, institutional and physical environment, as well as social and cultural environment. Outcomes for youth are related to education, health risk behaviours, social integration and mental and physical health (see Boardman & Onge, 2005 for a review). However, as Pretty (2002) has noted, we still have much to learn about how young people navigate their way through everyday experiences in their residential community, and how such experiences impact on their social needs for community identity and belonging.

When we have asked young people questions about community, they have responded with considerable insight and opinion about their neighbourhoods, and the larger physical and political communities in which these neighbourhoods are embedded. Hundreds of interviews with high school students in regional southeast Queensland (Chipuer et al., 1999) as well as with primary school children in Western Australia (Pooley, Pike, Drew & Breen, 2002), indicate an understanding of belonging and support within neighbourhoods, characteristics of good neighbourhoods, and sensitivity toward the quality of built and natural environments. Furthermore, the inclusiveness of this awareness is evident not only across developmental stages from nine to nineteen years, but also amongst youth with intellectual disabilities who are often positioned as 'clients' of community integration program

(Pretty, Rapley & Bramston, 2002).

Within rural and regional Australia, youth are seen as a critical primary resource in contemplating the 'sustainability crisis'. Young people maintain a community's identity ensuring its links with the community's history. They also sustain a community's economic future, injecting their energy and ideas (Lockie & Bourke, 2001). Much of the research in rural youth emigration to the major cities has focused on what is called structural disadvantage, particularly education and employment. Several strategies have attempted to deal with this, including supporting young people 'boarding' at schools in urban centres. As Laurent (2003) has described, these young people continue to maintain a strong identity with their home community throughout their boarding school experiences. However, most do not return. Higher education and employment opportunities ultimately influence their migration decisions (Eversole, 2002).

Research is indicating that community characteristics, such as sense of community, can further moderate the effects of structural disadvantage that leads to rural youth migration. For example, findings from over 3,000 Queensland youth who lived in communities smaller than 8,000 people showed community relationship factors accounted for 19% more of the variability in intention to stay than did indicators of structural disadvantage alone (Pretty, Bramston, Patrick & Pannach, 2006). Similarly Pretty, Chipuer and Bramston (2003) reported the relevance of community sentiment, place attachment and sense of community, to the intentions of youth to stay in their rural Australian towns after completing their education.

However, indicators of youth's sense of their community is central for the sustainability of all communities, given how much we will be depending on these young citizens as members of the 'social coalition' society. Recent research supports this concern. Of 500 young people surveyed from Victoria, da Silva, Sanson, Smart & Toumbourou (2004) reported that one in five adolescents participated in behaviours indicative of civic responsibility. Less than one in ten actively participated in political oriented behaviour, although there were positive levels of social awareness. Pretty (2004) looked more

broadly at pro-social behaviour to include informal, everyday occurrences of helping people outside of the familial context. She reported 50% of 2,130 adolescents from the Darling Downs region of Queensland indicated instances of such behaviour. Pretty found Australian youth are greatly influenced by adult mentors, in addition to parents, who are active in community work.

Some time ago, Edelson and O'Neil (1966) concluded, in the first exploration of political awareness related to adolescents' sense of community, that young people find it difficult to conceive of community as a whole and, therefore, lack abilities to contemplate the importance and consequences of civic responsibility. If some still hold that opinion, evidence from da Silva et al. (2004) suggests otherwise. They found 50% of their participants would participate in volunteer and political activities if more opportunities existed. As Omoto and Snyder (2002) suggest, sense of community is an integral factor in encouraging and maintaining support, and an attitude of responsibility, towards those we do not know personally. For these reasons, youths' sense of community should be on the agenda of all local civic councils. Indeed, Australia is increasingly challenged to attend to its young people more as "a resource rather than a problem" (Dadich, 2002, p. 28).

Conclusion

Sense of community offers an organising principle for research and practice in various areas such as community development, social capital, service provision, self help groups, and prevention and resilience in mental health interventions. Sense of community has been operationalised as a state like entity, and as the outcome of certain social processes. As such, a conceptual framework as been developed that allows understanding of the way people are socialised into their communities and maintain, or fail to establish and maintain, social engagement. This has also been understood in terms of process analysis of social change. Its linkage to power is important, as it helps define the setting in which power is used and is less likely to be abused.

From a process perspective, sense of community is a changing feature of people's relationships to others, and as such can be a barometer of change in community. It can be beneficial in helping people create a sense of identity and resilience to untoward social change. As a central aspect of the development and maintenance of social connectedness, it is useful in conceptualising adaptive and protective factors for positive life in community.

Sense of community can also be associated with negative aspects of social life. The nature of exclusion of 'others' can lead to harmful social consequences. Local social cohesiveness can be at the expense of minority groups and newly arrived immigrant groups. It can provide an analytic tool that allows us to see the positive and negative aspects of social structuring and power use. Sense of community can be used as political currency in the form of social capital which can be traded for financial capitol. However, this can set out a blaming the victim scenario as communities are empowered to take responsibility for the management of scarce social and economic resources.

We have attempted to show that sense of community has no boundaries or limitations in terms of lifespan development, intellectual or physical abilities, cultures, languages, social economic status, population density or geographic location. Hence, its presence in discourses of the professional, lay person and politician has no limitations. It, therefore, comes within the purview of psychology as a critically thinking discipline that espouses sense of community as a value and philosophy, to mind the sense with which people develop, engage and use their communities.

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Author Notes

Acknowledgements

Address correspondence to

Associate Professor Grace Pretty
Psychology Department
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba, QLD 4350
email: pretty@usq.edu.au

Sense of Community and Dynamics of Inclusion-Exclusion by Receiving Communities

Adrian Fisher
Christopher Sonn
Victoria University

Sense of community is a concept in community psychology that is usually associated with supportive environment and positive outcomes. However, the very nature of sense of community necessitates acts of social comparison to determine who can and cannot be accepted as members. This paper explores the dynamics of sense of community, drawing on theories of whiteness and moral exclusion to understand the ways in which – formally and informally – some immigrants and refugees are treated in Australia. There is clear evidence that the positive elements of sense of community can also be used in ways that work to exclude, stigmatise, as well as vilify the newcomers. This paper will draw upon the knowledgebase in areas of immigration, race, and oppression, together with the political stance inherent in the field to encourage community (and other) psychologists to actively enter into the public and private debates about the place of immigrants and refugees.

Sense of community is often proposed as a positive outcome, or a mediator, of beneficial social functioning. Seymour Sarason highlighted key elements of support and identity formation that would help provide society, as well as individual, prevention and mental health promotion ideals. Formalisation of the model by McMillan and Chavis (1986) brought together the ways in which membership of community could be celebrated and result in benefits to be shared. It is a model that has at its core the very positives of social life, support, and identity – things to which all can aspire.

However, McMillan and Chavis' (1986) conceptualisation was quickly criticised as it could be applied to what some have described as negative groups (Dunham, 1986). Dunham expressed concern that groups such as Hell's Angels and the Ku Klux Klan, groups that choose to separate from the mainstream, or choose to actively exclude others, can be interpreted as having positive psychological and social functioning, as indicated by their sense of community. While this may be a criticism of sense of community, it also illustrates that it does not always deal with the positive aspects of life, for example, insulating oneself and family from negative social surrounds (e.g., Brodsky, 1996). Indeed, sense of community can be used in negative ways – that is, the maximising of sense of community for one group can mean a minimisation of it, or effective exclusion of others.

In this paper, we will explore the ways in which sense of community can potentially operate with negative impacts on immigrant and refugee groups. The promotion or manipulation of elements of sense of community provide opportunities for active devaluation and exclusion of newcomers in order to promote the standing, privilege and status of, or at least parts of, the receiving community. In exploring these issues, we will first examine briefly the sense of community elements, and then the underlying processes of realistic conflict theory, moral exclusion and whiteness that can inhibit belonging.

Sense of Community Model. The model of sense of community proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) has held considerable sway within community psychology. It provides an effective way of understanding community and the benefits that can be gained from membership, however, the influence element alludes to potential negative impacts on members – when the influence of the community degenerates into a level of conformity or coercion in order that members will fit in. That is, freedom of expression and self-identity must be suppressed to the benefit or the advancement of the community's identity and aims.

Other elements of the model are typically

seen as much more positive, or at least benign. The ideas of fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection reflect positives for individual members and the community as a whole. Even membership provides a set of ideals and positive values that relate to identity, individual's contributions, and group maintenance. However, it is in this element that the potential for exclusion and negative psychological and socio-political efforts can arise.

One of the key aspects of the membership element is that of boundaries -- quite simply, this means who is and who is not a member of the community. For some communities, the boundaries are very permeable, with few criteria used to include or exclude people (e. g., residential communities initially reflect those who live in a given area). Others, however, have quite rigid boundaries – either for the protection of the group, or for the protection of something of value to the individual members.

Within *membership* other aspects reinforce its value – and can be used to determine who should or should not be included. A common symbols system can designate membership through aspects of physical appearance (e.g., clothing), language (including slang), architectural styles, or food. With boundaries, the common symbols interact to provide members with emotional safety and a sense of identity and belonging. From these develop the personal investment that members are willing to contribute to the maintenance and growth of their community. For some, this maintenance will be reflected in an active degree of exclusion of those seen as not worthy of belonging.

The functions of community membership and generation of sense of community extend beyond a simple feel good process. It is not static, nor necessarily an outcome. Bess, Fisher, Sonn, and Bishop (2002) illustrated that sense of community can be considered at multiple levels – SOC as the group and Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) as the individual level of analysis. They also indicated that at whichever level we conceptualise it, the nature of sense of community varies because it is context dependent. Sonn, Bishop and Drew (1999) argued that research into sense of community was problematic because, like many studies of

culture, research was often conducted within a postivistic framework which assumed that sense of community could be understood as singular and as an essence. The original McMillan and Chavis (1986) model was a neutral, almost static, description of some desired outcome. Bess et al. proposed that there are different ways in which the model is considered, but this is not necessarily explicated, in the research. It can be an outcome, a predictor, a mediator, or even a process.

In this paper, we consider SOC as a process, and the model allows us to explore the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the context of intergroup relations with immigrants and refugees. With the component of membership, we re-consider the role of boundaries in allowing newcomers to become members or to be excluded by the receiving community. We explore these processes at both the informal and formal, with the potential for strong political ideals and processes underpinning the ways in which these groups are socially construed. Importantly, at a formal political level, we must face the issues of how and why this is achieved.

Immigrants, Receiving Communities and SOC

For immigrants and refugees there are processes of settlement and acculturation (cultural adjustment and adaptation) to negotiate. If the receiving nation is receptive, these processes are often more easily achieved, with integration and bicultural outcomes seen as positives, both socially and psychologically for those settling in the new country (Berry, 1997). Achieving these outcomes requires an ongoing process from the existing members of the receiving community to foster and allow permeable boundaries and to make their own acculturation adjustments. That is, as Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) said so long ago, the acculturation process is bi-directional. Consequently, integration and bicultural outcomes will be reflected within the receiving community. This, however, has not been given as much attention in the research, and it requires a political will on the part of the relevant representative governments to put in place policies, strategies, and rhetoric which will serve to make these adjustments positive from all perspectives.

Should there be a lack of will to accept the newcomers, to allow them through the boundaries to membership of the national community, there are numerous potential psychological and social problems to be faced. Such a lack of will can be exhibited either in formal policy and practice, or in the actions of the citizenry. Sonn and Fisher (2005) listed a variety of government responses to immigrants in Australia over different time periods. These highlighted the assimilationist 'New Australian' policies of the 1950s-70s, in which crossing the boundaries was predicated on the abandonment of home identity and culture and taking on the culture and identity of the receiving community. Seemingly, the bi-directional nature of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936) was not a sufficiently strong notion for the Australian government, or opposition, of those times.

"New Australian" policies were followed by a multicultural, integrationist approach that is now the official policy, and has received political and financial support in order for it to be effectively implemented (but which has been weakened by, at the most generous construal, benign neglect on the part of the federal government). As Philip Ruddock, then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs wrote:

Australia today is a culturally and linguistically diverse society and will remain so. Like our sophisticated migration program, our multicultural policy continues our tradition of successful nation building. It will help us to ensure that we meet the challenge of drawing the best from the many histories and cultures of the Australian people, *within a framework of a uniting set of Australian values* [emphasis added]. (Ruddock, 2003)

Recently, the rhetoric of the government has not matched the multiculturalism policies, with some groups of immigrants and refugees almost vilified (e.g., queue jumpers, children overboard, and some maladaptive groups). Some of the current political rhetoric in Australia, from the main political parties on both sides of politics, reflects rejection of

integration and multicultural approaches to immigration in favour of more assimilationist ideas. Talk of English language and citizenship tests has gained degrees of populist support – but has been taken to an extreme with ideas of having tourists sign declarations to abide by "Australian values" -- which are not defined. While this may be of supposed electoral advantage, the wisdom and real outcomes of the process are questioned. It leads to official statements of us and them; of declarations of what or who is or is not worthy.

In fact, this talk reflects the construction of boundaries, a worthy in-group. For the individuals and groups defined as other by official policy it evokes negative stereotypes and rejection. It has the potential of dividing the incoming communities into those who must internalise these characteristics and develop negative self-images, and even as Bourdieu et al. (1999) indicated, self-hate and in the internalisation of stigma inherent in the application of collective representations of non-dominant groups (Major & O'Brien, 2003). Further, it could lead to those stigmatised to react in even more negative ways and so isolate and refuse to engage with the broader dominant community. The official 'othering' and exclusion raises spectre of not of this place, and not welcomed.

Populist political approaches are then able to afford support to the informal levels of inclusion or exclusion. There are several ways in which this occurs and for a variety of reasons. A simple example of this was used by Fisher and Sonn (2002) in their study of sense of community and dealing with change in Australia. When asked "What does it mean to you to be an Australian?" participants were able to quickly identify images, myths and stories that provided the bases of 'Australian' identity – a collective representation of the stereotypes that are shared, often unconsciously, by members of a culture (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) explored not just the representations, but how people actually used them in order to have an understanding of interactions in daily life. That is, the representations provide a framework and set of explanations for the meanings of social activities.

In their research, Fisher and Sonn (2002)

found that the simple use of slang and cultural references (exacerbated by speed of speech) could effectively exclude others – even those who shared the same basic language. This reflected not so much a negative exclusion, but a protection of a valued identity, particularly when travelling in other countries. In the same way that immigrants and refugees protect identities that are challenged because of dislocation and relocation. This can be through social clubs, use of home languages, and maintenance of diet and celebrations.

While exclusionary processes are in place, community members may not actually realise what they are doing or the impacts that it can have – either for those excluded or for the community itself. In examining the functioning of a parish community, Miers and Fisher (2002) found an odd contradiction between sense of community and the ongoing existence of the community. The members reported a high sense of community and strong interpersonal links within the group. Indeed, they were so happy with their community that they were unwelcoming of new members – who often left. While this maintained and protected the sense of community, it threatened the continuation of the community as a whole.

This exclusionary process does, however, give rise to the use of sense of community elements in ways that are not just protective, but potentially malicious. The common symbols and shared history that are a part of the building and maintenance of identity come into play as means of developing rigid and impermeable boundaries. Hence, immigrants can come, but they do not really belong and are not really welcomed. Even if they can pass the government's new language and citizenship tests, there are simple everyday ways of continuing to exclude them as not really belonging.

Acculturation and the Dynamics of Exclusion
Realistic conflict theory and moral exclusion

Why this exclusion may occur can have many interpretations. One is that there is a real or perceived competition for scarce resources, such as jobs. Several researchers have applied and extended realistic conflict theory to receiving communities' hostile and potential racist and discriminatory responses to immigrants. Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, Armstrong, and Tamara (2001)

have showed that perceived competition for scarce resources is a key factor influencing attitudes toward multiculturalism, and those who believed that the world is hierarchically structured have negative attitudes towards immigration. Arguably, this can be a class-based phenomenon, with the less skilled lower class perceiving themselves as most vulnerable to the competition. Often, these are the people most responsive to the politicians' populist rhetoric, and receptive of the moral exclusion (Opotow, 1990) that underlies such calls.

Moral exclusion is defined in relation to the scope of justice and occurs when individuals of groups fall outside "the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness applies" (Opotow, 1990, p. 1). Moral exclusion occurs in a series of processes involving the perception of conflict or tension, the construction of groups as expendable or worthy, justification of those constructions, justification of processes for exclusion, and the implementation of harmful policies (Opotow, 1990; 2001). This can be a process underlying the granting or refusing membership to a community by excluding those deemed unworthy.

In a study of moral exclusion and racism in Western Australia, Papadopoulos (1997) showed how community members mobilised populist rhetoric to justify the exclusion of vulnerable others from the community. In the first stage of the study, the highly publicised maiden speech of Pauline Hanson in parliament was analysed using discourse analysis to understand the dynamics of moral exclusion. The politician constructed vulnerable groups (immigrants and Indigenous people) as ones who received 'handouts' and other benefits from the government, while the more deserving mainstream [white] Australians were being left out. Mainstream Australian was presented as the group that needed to be looked after and that is being overrun by [Asian] immigrants and Aboriginal people. These immigrants and Aboriginal people were said to be different, did not want to assimilate, and often misused resources provided to them. Political correctness was criticised and the policy and ideology of multiculturalism blamed for the problems faced by the nation. She constructed worthy and unworthy groups, playing to the fears and prejudices of many in the receiving

community.

The construction of worthy and unworthy groups is central to understanding the responses of receiving communities. This requires that we examine how power and privilege is expressed in the differential access that communities have to social, cultural, and symbolic resources. In this case, vulnerable communities are constructed as the sources of conflict threatening mainstream Australians.

Whiteness, Sense of Community and Exclusion

As an essential component of sense of community is social comparison, we can see processes of othering at the informal level: 'They are not like us, can't be like us, we won't let them be like us'. This assists in determining who is and is not a member of our community by defining the necessary characteristics of members. Social identity theory can be used to explore the nature of these in-group and out-group comparisons. At its simplest, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) will explain the preferences we have for those like us against those who are different. At a more complex level, it refers to the ways in which we make categories for ourselves and others, and through which the group to which we belong is shown to have its own distinct, positive elements. Using this, we develop a favouritism for those who are also members, and reduce access to those who are not.

Whiteness: The dynamics of othering, of processes of moral exclusion, have been explored in research in race relations, in particular the growing area of whiteness studies (for example, Green, 2004; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Mun Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993, Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Nakayama & Krizek, 1999; Twine & Warren, 2000). Whiteness studies concerns antiracism and how white people's identities and positions are shaped by racialised cultures. Frankenberg (1993) wrote that whiteness can be broadly defined as "...the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (p. 236).

While whiteness has originated in the study of race relations, the title reflects the metaphor for dominant and non-dominant cultures. Clearly, this is a metaphor that is appropriate in the study of immigrants, refugees and receiving

communities as the power differentials can be immense. Coincidentally, many of the receiving communities are also controlled by populations with Anglo-European origins.

In Australia, whiteness has been argued as placing white people in dominant positions and granting white people many privileges. These are often not visible to white people – but are reflected in their collective representations (Major & O'Brien, 2003). However, the meaning of whiteness is also more complex than this and, although whiteness cannot be separated from hegemony, the relations of power within whiteness are not monolithic, complete, nor uniform (Frankenberg, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Whiteness is multifaceted, situationally specific, and reinscribed around the changing meanings of race in larger society.

Whiteness studies are particularly useful to understand the dynamics of exclusion because of the focus on examining how groups in positions of privilege, or relative privilege, engage in practices to retain that privilege. To this end, whiteness studies are concerned with understanding the social, cultural and symbolic resources and processes through which privilege is maintained and, therefore, provides a vehicle through which receiving community responses to newcomers can be explicated and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion made visible. As such, whiteness studies can also be used to understand how dominant cultures maintain the key elements of their sense of community and, especially through the membership element, reinforce the boundaries against the metaphorical non-whites. Moral exclusion then raises this to a justifiable economic argument.

While examining the links between diversity, social relations and economic development in rural and remote communities, Bertone and Sonn (2005; Sonn & Bertone, 2006) revealed the complex workings of race as an ideology in community responses to immigrants. In one community, established immigrant groups from Christian, European backgrounds (Italians, Greeks) were well accepted, while later arrivals (Turks, Albanians, Punjabi, Indians, Iraqi and Afghan refugees) faced a range of subtle and less subtle barriers, such as social isolation, under-employment and unemployment.
A key point in the research (Bertone & Sonn,

2005; Sonn & Bertone, 2006) was that, although different groups of people were accepted in the community and people did not see race relations as an issue, the data suggested a hierarchy of acceptability -- with those closer to the unarticulated ideal more likely to be accepted. Refugees and immigrants were welcomed if they were perceived as prepared to work and make a contribution, but some were also resented because they were seen as welfare dependent and reluctant to integrate [assimilate] through participating in social and cultural settings. Central to the sense of community model are the notions of shared symbols and values. These values and symbols are rooted in a deeper culture and often expressed in the context of work and as a work ethic. Those who are similar are welcomed; those who are deemed other are excluded and often blamed for their own exclusion.

The power and privilege to determine belonging is a central dynamic of the othering processes that are observed in race relations. According to Hage (1998), to feel a greater sense of 'governmental belonging' is to feel more or less white – or Australian. Governmental belonging is how some people feel that their views and opinions about national issues are represented in the public arena. This gives white Australians the right to be concerned about issues such as immigration and multiculturalism. These concerns are typically about making decisions whether newcomers are desirable and if they will contribute to the nation. The others, the immigrants and refugees, are represented as objects to be managed. As with moral exclusion (Opotow, 1990, 2001), notions of human rights and the plight of these communities become displaced and the issue becomes one of conflict over resources.

Whiteness theory allows us to explore the dynamics of cultural racism, those symbolic and cultural resources and practices that may be everyday and often invisible to those close to the centre of power. However, they are very visible to those who are marginalised and impact in negative ways. Internationally, there are many communities facing the challenges of reverse immigration, where those from former colonies are immigrating to the countries of the former colonisers. These immigrants are often not welcomed and different strategies are put in place to protect the power and privilege of the receiving communities (Bourdieu et al., 1999). These challenges play out in everyday settings and have implications for receiving communities. Some have responded to the negative constructions in the media and other forms of communication by withdrawing. Others find themselves locked up and constructed as illegal and as threats to national security.

Conclusion

Immigrants and refugees face significant disruptions to their lives and cultures, often losing contact with family and friends (Sonn & Fisher, 2005). Yet, the reasons most usually given for undertaking the process is to build a better life for themselves and their children in a new land – to be members of a community that does not limit the opportunities and resources required for living based on dimensions of race, culture, religion or gender. While this is the ideal, there are many barriers which impede that new life and acceptance.

The membership element of sense of community theory is based on ideas of social comparison, and is usually premised on the idea of a positive outcome for members and for the community itself. All community membership is a balance between the individual's needs and those of the collective. As shown by Miers and Fisher (2002), even at is most benign, promotion of sense of community of the individual members can have serious consequences for the community as a whole. Active engagement is required in order to not just maintain, but also to grow the community – reflecting the ongoing need to recruit new members, as well as understanding the social dynamics within which the community operates and functions.

As a national community, the growing of membership and maintenance takes on dimensions beyond the individual and into the political realm. The ways in which debates about immigration and refugees are framed, with assimilationist overtones, play into simplistic, populist notions of sense of community, while stigmatising and excluding those who do not hold the privileged position of being a member of the dominant group (Bourdieu et al., 1999; Hage, 1998; Majors & O'Brien, 2003).

The privilege of being in the dominant

group provides ready access to the collective representations (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Major & O'Brien, 2003) of the dominant community. How these are used will be reflected in the permeability or hardness of the boundaries of community membership. The informal, planned or otherwise, use of collective representations can serve to exclude others, whether for positive reasons to do with identity maintenance and social support (Fisher & Sonn, 2002), for reasons of social comparison and competition for scarce resources (Esses et al., 2001), or for malicious reasons of oppression of those who are not deamed worthy (Opotow, 1990, 2001).

In summary, we have sought to utilise sense of community, a key concept in community psychology, to explore the dynamics of intergroup relations from the vantage point of communities receiving immigrants. The model can provide a dynamic set of constructs and processes that allows us to explore how communities respond to perceive or real threats to taken for granted privileges and ways of being. We use the idea of moral exclusion to explore the social and psychological dynamics at the formal and informal levels to explicate processes of boundary creation that work to other and exclude those who are deemed unworthy of belonging to a moral community. Boundary creation is a key part of sense of community and often achieved through the retrieval, creation and mobilisation of symbolic resources which serve as markers of distinction. These markers of distinction are historically determined, like many collective representations, they are based in the history of a community and are used to include and exclude.

In the Australian case, some of the collective representations are tied to understandings of race that are rooted in the history of colonisation. A core part of these representations are tied to the notion of whiteness that has been central to the subjugation of Indigenous people and different waves of immigrants to Australia. It is through the lenses of whiteness and moral exclusion that we are able to examine the content and dynamics of the sense of community as it is mobilised by receiving communities.

We have proposed that sense of community is to be considered as a process, not as a simple

outcome. As such, we have the position to explore, understand, and expose the ways in which sense of community (or surrogate terms) is used to manifest racist and exclusionary practices. The knowledge that community psychology has developed in areas of immigration, race, and oppression, together with the political stance inherent in the field, provides and impetus for us to actively enter into the public and private debates about the place of immigrants and refugees. It is imperative that we use and publicly articulate this knowledge in order to counter the negative psychological and social impacts that political rhetoric and inaction has on the targeted groups.

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Address correspondence to
Adrian Fisher
School of Psychology
Victoria University
PO Box 14428
Melbourne 8001
Australia
email: Adrian.Fisher@vu.edu.au

The Relational Health Indices:
Confirming Factor Structure for Use With Men

Belle Liang
Boston College
Allison Tracy
Wellesley College
Catherine Glenn
Boston College
Shaun Michael Burns
Boston College
David Ting
Havard Medical School

The psychometrics of the Relational Health Indices (RHI) were previously established in a sample of young women (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002a). The current study explored the use of the RHI with men by examining the generalizability of the measure's factor structure and convergent validity in 140 male and 406 female college students. Confirmatory factor analyses revealed that for each of the three indices (i.e., close friend, mentor, and community relationships), the embedded dimensions of engagement/empathy, authenticity, and empowerment were not empirically distinct; a single factor model fit well and the factor structure was invariant across sex for each index. The indices demonstrated good internal consistency across sex, and correlations between the RHI and convergent validation scales were significant and in the direction hypothesized.

The *Relational-Cultural Model* (RCM) is rooted in the seminal work of Jean Baker Miller, who presented a new conceptualization of human development in her book *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Miller, 1976). In contrast to traditional psychological theories that conceive of separation-individuation as the ultimate goal of development (Erikson, 1968), RCM theorists posit that all psychological growth and development occurs in the context of growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Jordan, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Walker & Rosen, 2004; Jordan, Walker, & Hartling, 2004; Robb, 2006). Based on clinical data, growth-fostering relationships have been defined as those characterized by: (a) mutual engagement/empathy (i.e., perceived mutual involvement, commitment, and attunement to the relationship); (b) authenticity (i.e., the process of acquiring knowledge of self and the other and feeling free to be genuine in the context of the relationship); and (c) empowerment/zest (i.e., the experience of feeling personally strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to take action) (Jordan, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Research on relationships has supported a link between these relational qualities and positive psychological outcomes/growth. For example, studies on closeness and empathy indicate that mutual engagement may mediate stress and depression and is associated with self-esteem, self-actualization, cooperation, low interpersonal distress, and relationship satisfaction (Beeber, 1998; Burnett & Demnar, 1996; Gawronski & Privette, 1997; Schreurs & Buunk, 1996; Shulman & Knafo, 1997). Authenticity is associated with being liked, increased liking of others, and motivation in relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994; Kay & Christophel, 1995). Empowerment is linked with positive affect, meaningful activity, and creativity (Hall & Nelson, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995).

The presence of this combination of qualities - mutual empathy, engagement, authenticity, and engagement - in a relationship has been termed Relational Health (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002a). As evidenced in clinical data, Relational Health has been shown to bolster one's sense of self-worth and vitality, validate one's identity, reinforce one's knowledge of self and others, and instill a

desire for further connection (Jordan, 1992, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Moreover, applications of the RCM are rapidly expanding to address a broad-range of psychological and social issues, including psychotherapy, inpatient treatment, substance abuse, chronic illness, depression, trauma, eating disorders, mother-daughter relationships, HIV prevention, racism, sexism, and classism (Amaro, 1995; Covington, 1998; Finkelstein, 1996; Hartling & Ly, 2000; Nelson, 1996; Riggs & Bright, 1997).

Unfortunately, empirical research on the RCM has suffered from two major limitations. The first limitation is the lack of empirical measures reflecting the model's essential concepts (Liang et al., 2002a). The second is the lack of studies aimed at applying the model to men, in contrast to the growing body of literature examining the RCM as it pertains to women (Liang, Tracy, Kauh, Taylor, & Williams, 2006; Liang et al., 2002a; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002b). This paper describes a study in which a recent, empirical measure designed to assess growth-fostering relationships is applied to men, in an initial examination of the generalizability of the measure's factor structure and validity across sex. This measure, called the Relational Health Indices (RHI; Liang et al., 2002a), has previously been validated in a sample of women. The current study attempts to extend this work by contributing to the paucity of literature on the RCM among men, and represents a starting point from which to explore what growth-fostering relationships may mean to men, and how to measure growth-fostering relationships in men.

The Relational-Cultural Model and Men

In keeping with its feminist roots, the development of theory and research on the RCM has primarily focused on women thus far. This work has at times suggested that men are less "relational" than women, or that they somehow value or need relationships less than their female counterparts (Chu, Porche, & Tolman, 2005; Gilligan, 1982; Mansfield, McAllister, & Collard, 1992). Yet other evidence supports the contrary position: 1) men in fact rely on and need relationships as much as do women, and 2) relational qualities similar to those proposed by the RCM are relevant across gender (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Indeed, Baumeister's theory of

belongingness argues that all individuals, regardless of gender, experience a need to belong, and a specific need for trusting, mutual relationships; these relational experiences are believed to be necessary for the psychological development and well-being of both men and women (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Similarly, Bergman (1996) has argued that the RCM qualities may be just as relevant for men as for women, and that engaged, authentic, and empowering relationships are conducive to men's psychological health and well-being. More recently, a relationally-based measure of adolescent masculinity has been developed that is founded on the belief that adolescent males seek out and rely on close, meaningful relationships for well-being and identity development (Chu et al., 2005). Chu and colleagues (2005) assert that male-male relationships are so essential to the development and well-being of young men that they often behave according to masculine norms specifically in order to seek out and preserve their peer relationships, and to avoid being cast out of social groups, which provide support and identity. Indeed, more empirical evidence is needed to understand the qualities of relationships that positively impact the psychological development and health of men.

Operationalizing Relational Health: Present Limitations.

In addition to the paucity of studies on men, research on growth-fostering relationships has been limited in a variety of ways. First, much of the past work (Genero et al., 1992) has focused exclusively on certain types of dyadic relationships, such as peer friendships or romantic relationships. The limited focus on dyadic relationships in relational literature is problematic, given that there are a variety of types of relationships, and men and women may value these types differently. In fact, one study found that, although men intensely value their peer relationships, they are more likely than women are to seek out and benefit from relationships that are more group-oriented, or based on collective identity (Seeley, Gardner, Pennington, & Gabriel, 2003).

Another limitation to existing work is that many measures of relationship quality have tended to reflect behavioral manifestations of intimacy, such as talking with a friend or partner

(Shumway & Wampler, 2002), rather than underlying qualities, such as a sense of trust. This limitation may bias the research toward female-oriented ways of expressing important underlying qualities of relationships (Kelly & Hall, 1992; Prager, 1995; Twohey & Ewing, 1995). Indeed, self-disclosure and talking about the relationship are often considered signs of true intimacy, even though for men, doing activities together may be another meaningful way that men develop and maintain intimacy (Pollack, 1999). Even if behavioral expressions of Relational Health may differ between men and women, it is possible that the underlying qualities of Relational Health may be more constant across sex. To test this possibility, measures are needed that reflect underlying *qualities* of intimacy—authenticity, engagement/empathy, and empowerment/zest—that the RCM identifies as being sought after and needed by both men and women, rather than examine *behaviors* as the sole indicators of Relational Health.

The Relational Health Indices (RHI)

To address the existing lack of empirical measures of Relational Health, Liang and colleagues (2002a) developed an instrument called the Relational Health Indices (RHI) designed to assess engagement/empathy, authenticity, and empowerment/zest in three contexts: close friend, mentor, and community relationships. Examining Relational Health across three relational contexts allows for a more complex and nuanced picture, which is important given that people simultaneously engage in various types of intimate and meaningful relationships. The psychometric properties of the Relational Health Indices were initially tested in a sample of young women; and the Relational Health Indices were found to be reliable, valid, and useful measures of growth-fostering relationships (Liang et al., 2002a). Specifically, the factor analyses confirmed a three subscale structure, supporting the theory-based proposition that individuals make distinctions based on three types of relational qualities: engagement/empathy, authenticity, and empowerment. The internal consistency investigation suggested good reliability for each of the three composite

indices (i.e., close friend, mentor, and community) and the authenticity, engagement/empathy and empowerment subscales. Finally, the significant positive correlations between the RHI and measures assessing similar constructs provided evidence of the RHI's convergent validity.

Applying the RHI to Men

The Relational Health Indices may be apropos for use with men for two major reasons. The first is that the indices measure the experience of underlying qualities of relationships, which, as mentioned above, may be more similarly relevant across gender than behaviors or specific functions of a given relationship assessed with previous measures. In other words, because the Relational Health Indices are designed to focus on the *experience* of relationships, rather than solely on *outward manifestations or behaviors*, these indices may be more suited to measuring the growth-fostering connections of men than other, more limited measures of close relationships. For example, the one other published measure based on RCM concepts, the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (MPDQ; Genero et al., 1992), is an assessment based on impressions during verbal interactions with a partner. Similarly, a proposed measure of couple relationships, The Couple Behavior Report (CBR) focuses solely on behaviors, such as saying hello to one's partner (Shumway & Wampler, 2002). The RHI, on the other hand, includes attitudinal assessments in more general context (e.g., "I can be genuinely myself with my mentor", "I feel understood by my friend", and, "I feel a sense of belonging to this community"). In this way, the RHI items were not designed to focus solely on gender specific behaviors, but rather underlying experiences that may be relevant across gender.

The second reason that the RHI may be particularly useful for work with men is that the RHI measures growth-fostering qualities across three domains: close friend, mentor, and community. This allows for the examination of variations in the *type* of relationships that men may value most, rather than assuming that men do not value or benefit from relationships if they have low levels of one type of

relationship. It is important to note that both men and women consistently rank peer relationships as highly important to them -- eclipsing even the salience of their relationships with their own parents and other family members, particularly in late adolescence and emerging adulthood (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Windle, 2000; Wood, Vinson, & Sher, 2001). Similarly, young men and women consistently identify mentor figures as playing a major role in their lives (Blyth, Hill, & Smith, 1982; Garbarino, Burston, Raber, Russell, Crouter, 1978). Thus, the RHI provides the opportunity to examine RCM qualities in the context of a variety of relationships relevant for both males and females.

The Present Study

This study attempted to address simultaneously the lack of empirical measures reflecting the Relational-Cultural Model's concepts and the lack of studies aimed at applying the model to men by expanding the development of the Relational Health Indices. Specifically, the RHI items and validity measures were administered to both college-age men and women to examine the generalizability of the RHI's factor structure, as well as to replicate evidence for its reliability and convergent validity across sex. Comparing the RHI's factor structure across sex to confirm measurement invariance is a logical prerequisite to conducting substantive cross-sex comparisons of the RHI (e.g., tests of group mean differences, invariance of structural parameter estimates) (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). It was expected that the RHI's factor structure would be similar for men and for women. Moreover, we expected that the measure would demonstrate reliability and convergent validity across sex.

This research aims to add to existing literature on the psychology of women as it compares to the psychology of men by providing a first step towards the creation of measures for examining the application of RCM to men's close friend, mentor, and community connections. That is, the RHI could be used as a base from which to conduct future exploratory and confirmatory work for: 1) developing items that are not overly biased toward women's ways of expressing growth-fostering relationships, but also reflect men's ways of relating; and 2) assessing whether RCM concepts are as valued by men as they are by women. If this and future studies were to demonstrate that the RHI is equally appropriate for use with men and women, these studies would together provide a much needed elucidation of how the RCM applies to men, as well as add to the field's understanding of the universal or shared aspects of relationships that all people need and benefit from. Furthermore, a gender neutral measure of Relational Health is expected to be useful for practitioners and researchers alike who work with male and female clients and research participants, respectively.

Method

Participants

The total number of participants in the current survey study were 149 college men (ranging in age from 18-24, $M = 19.79$, $SD = 1.18$) and 406 women (age range = 17-32, $M = 19.63$, $SD = 1.19$) at a co-ed liberal arts college. Eighty-five percent of participants were White, 6% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 3% Black, and 2% a race or ethnicity other than those identified in the present study. Only a subset of these participants (102 college men, age range: 18-24, $M = 19.59$, $SD = 1.15$; 243 women, age range: 18-32, $M = 19.60$, $SD = 1.36$) were included in the convergent validity study; the larger sample was used for the factor analyses. Of the 557 respondents who took the survey, 545 (98%) completed the peer friendship-related analyses and 529 (95%) completed the community-related analyses. Four hundred and fifty-seven participants (82%) were able to identify a mentor; this sub-sample of respondents was representative of the overall sample in terms of sex and racial/ethnic composition, class standing, age, GPA, measures of social class and SAT scores.

Procedure

After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval for our sample and procedure, we proceeded as follows.

Initial Exploration of Relevance of RHI Items to Men. As a preliminary examination of the applicability of the RCM concepts and RHI items to men, we conducted a series of focus

groups with young men, which were similar to those conducted with young women during the creation of the RHI. A researcher explained the focus group study to students in several classes at a university and at a high school in the Northeast. Male students in these courses were asked to volunteer for the groups. Students signed informed consent forms which explained that their responses would be confidential and anonymous.

Two groups each of male college and high school students with diverse ethnic backgrounds were convened. Their demographics were representative of the general student populations at their schools. Each focus group of six to eight members, facilitated by two trained research assistants, involved a single session lasting about 1 to 1.5 hours. Participants were asked to describe their relationships with mentors, close peer friends, and close groups or communities, including: 1) definitions (e.g., how would you define "a mentor"); 2) level of importance (e.g., do you have a mentor, and how important is s/he to you compared to your other relationships?); 3) relationship characteristics (e.g., describe the positive and negative aspects of your relationships with your mentor); and 4) ways of interacting in each relationship to reflect the qualities described (e.g., "since you say that your relationship with your friend is 'real and honest,' how does this show up in your relationship?"). Students also critically assessed the three RCM constructs (i.e., authenticity, engagement/empathy, empowerment) and the items in the Relational Health Indices for relevance to their real-life relationships. The participants spontaneously clarified and elaborated on each other's comments. At times, the facilitators directed participants to stay on task and to clarify their statements with prompts such as, "Can you give an example?" and "Does anyone have anything to add to that?" Each focus group ended when members had no more responses.

Findings from the focus groups served as an initial confirmation of the relevance and wording of the Relational Health Indices items. That is, participants found the items to be relevant to, and descriptive of, close friend, mentor, and community relationships. When asked whether they would suggest omitting or changing any of the items, no major edits were deemed absolutely necessary.

Survey study. Survey packets with the original RHI items, validity scales, and demographic information were distributed to students in four, large psychology courses at a co-ed college in the Northeast. Participation was voluntary and was elicited during the beginning of a class. Students signed informed consent forms which explained that their responses to the surveys would be confidential and anonymous. Respondents were offered extra credit for participation. Each participant was instructed to complete the entire survey in one sitting. All participants completed the RHI and demographic items, but only a subset received these items plus the convergent validity scales. Specifically, the first two classes received all of the study measures for the confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) and convergent validity analyses; the additional two classes were used only in the CFA to ensure an adequate male sample size for this statistical procedure.

Participants receiving the additional convergent validity scales submitted their responses on-line at a time and place of their choosing through a web-based survey hosted on a secure server at the university where the study was conducted. Software associated with the on-line questionnaire enabled participants to fill out a survey only once by tracking their student identification numbers, and kept their responses anonymous and confidential. Only the researcher could access this data. The other two classes filled out their surveys during class time.

Instrumentation

Relational Health. The Relational Health Indices (RHI; Liang et al., 2002a) is a 37-item questionnaire that assesses the perceived quality of dyadic and group relationships, as defined by characteristics of growth-fostering relationships set forth by the RCM. Survey respondents were asked to rate three relationships: 1) their closest friend or peer ("someone whom you feel attached to through respect, affection, and/or common interests, someone you can depend on for support and who depends on you"), 2)

someone who represented their most significant non-kin mentor ("someone who is older than you, more experienced than you, and guides you in some area of your life"), and 3) their college community. Sample items for the close peer friend, mentor, and community scales, respectively include: "After spending time together [with my friend], I feel energized," "I can be genuinely myself with my mentor," and "It seems as if people in this community really like me as a person." Ratings for each item were made using a Likert-type scale from "1=never" to "5=always" with high scores indicating the presence of growth-fostering qualities in close friend, mentor, and community relationships. The RHI subscales have been validated using data from an ethnically diverse sample of young women attending a women's college in the Northeast (Liang et al., 2002a). In this earlier validation study, the indices showed evidence of concurrent and convergent validity and high reliability (α = 0.85, 0.86, & 0.90 for the peer friend, mentor, and community indices, respectively). Additional studies using the RHI have confirmed the significance of relational engagement/empathy, authenticity, and empowerment/zest to the relational and psychological health of young women from diverse backgrounds (Liang et al., 2002b; Liang et al., 2006).

In addition to the RHI, three previously validated measures that address constructs similar to the relational aspects assessed in the RHI were used to test convergent validity. These scales asked respondents to rate the same mentor and friend relationship they had rated for the RHI items.

Mentor relationships. The Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (MPDQ; Genero et al., 1992) is a 22-item measure that reflects RCM concepts including perceived mutuality in close relationships. The measure has been tested on men with good test-retest and internal reliability with alphas ranging from .87 to .93. The RHI differs from the MPDQ in two essential ways: 1) the RHI is not limited to querying about verbal interactions, and 2) the RHI assesses community relationships in addition to dyadic relationships. MPDQ items include items such

as, "[when we talk about things that matter to my mentor, I am likely to] be receptive" and are rated on a scale from "1 = never" to "6 = all the time." Higher scores indicate more closely connected and mutual relationships. The item sets for which average composite scores were created showed evidence of excellent reliability in our sample (α = 0.95 and 0.89 for males and females, respectively).

Close peer friendships. The Quality of Relationships Questionnaire (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Solky-Butzel, & Nagle, 1997) was designed to assess the quality of three aspects of a dyadic relationship: support (7 items), depth (6 items), and conflict (13 items). It differs from the RHI in that it does not aim to assess underlying qualities such as authenticity, engagement/empathy, and empowerment. Items, such as "How positive a role does this person play in your life," were rated on a scale from "1 = not at all" to "4 = very much" with high scores indicating positive relationship quality. The reliability coefficients for the three QRI subscales ranged from 0.85 to 0.88 for males and from 0.82 to 0.90 for females in our study.

The Friend Support subscale of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSSUP; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) is a 4-item measure of perceived social support from friends. Sample items including "my friends really try to help me" and "I can talk about my problems with my friends," are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 4=strongly agree) with high scores indicating strong support. In past studies, the MSSUP has demonstrated good factorial validity and construct validity (Zimet et al., 1988), as well as good internal reliability for the Friend subscale (α = 0.85). The reliability coefficients in our study sample were high for both males (α =0.88) and females (α =0.92).

Analyses

The purpose of this study was to apply the RHI to men as well as to women, with whom it was initially developed, and to develop a version of this instrument that shows evidence of measurement invariance across sex. The analysis models were all conducted in a structural equation modeling framework,

using the Mplus statistical package, version 4.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998). Due to the skew observed in the items, we used the WLSMV estimator (Satorra & Bentler, 1994), which is robust to violations of multivariate normality. The indicators were specified as continuous but censored from above.

The first task in this study was to assess the dimensionality of the items within each domain (i.e., peer friend, mentor, and community) for men and women separately. We hypothesized that the dimensions of Relational Health identified in the theoretical model underpinning the instrument development, namely, authenticity, engagement/empathy, and empowerment would be evident for both men and women. Using each set of items, we tested this hypothesis by conducting a series of confirmatory factor analysis for men and women separately. Since the original scale was developed with an all-female sample, we first fit the models to the women's data. Based on the results of these models, we identified items that performed well (loadings > 0.40) in the women's models and fitted the reduced item models to the men's data. Our core set of items were those that performed well in both the women's and men's models, both in terms of the overall model fit and the strength of the factor loadings and item reliability estimates.

Next, we hypothesized that Relational Health, as operationalized by the RHI, would contain a set of items with equivalent measurement properties across women and men. In order to establish the degree of measurement invariance across sex, we conducted a series of multiple group confirmatory factor models for each Relational Health domain. In these models, we first specified a model in which the measurement parameters (loadings and intercepts) were freely estimated in each sex group. Then, we estimated a model in which these measurement parameters were constrained to be equal across sex groups. Finally, we calculated the chi-square difference scores for each pair of nested models to determine whether the assumption of measurement invariance was tenable. If the assumption of measurement invariance resulted in a significant decrement in model fit,

we identified individual items likely to be sex non-invariant, using the discrepancy between the freely estimated measurement parameter estimates across sex and the derivative values associated with the measurement parameters. Through an iterative process, we arrived at a final set of items that demonstrated sufficient invariance across sex. Having identified a set of sex-invariant items for each relationship domain, we could compare the quality of relationships directly for women and men.

Finally, we wished to establish evidence of the construct validity of our sex-equivalent scale. Using the invariant measurement models, we conducted validity tests for both men and women: estimating correlations between the latent factor scores derived from the Relational Health items and existing measures we identified as measuring similar constructs. These models were conducted in a multiple groups structural equation modeling framework, constraining measurement parameters for the RHI to be equal across sex but allowing correlations among constructs to be freely estimated.

Results

The confirmatory factor analyses assessing the presence of relational dimensions revealed that the embedded subscales of authenticity, engagement/empathy, and empowerment shared so much variance (typically correlated from .90 - .99) that they were statistically indistinguishable in this sample, even creating convergence problems in several models. Because of this, we allowed the items to load on a single dimension – overall relationship quality.

The unidimensional factor models for the peer friend and community domains revealed that the reverse-scored items (one item in the peer friend index and three items in the community index) had weak factor loadings (< .30), even after accounting for the reverse-scoring as a method factor. These items were omitted from the core set of items to be used in the measurement invariance models. The fit statistics for the models are given in Table 1.

Measurement Invariance

Next, we conducted a series of multiple group confirmatory factor models for each Relational Health domain to test our hypothesis of measurement invariance across sex. Models not initially passing the invariance test were

Table 1. *Model fit indices assessing the measurement model separately by sex.*

	Females		Males
	Full Item Set	Reduced Item Set	Reduced Item Set
RHI-Close friend			
N	398	398	146
# of items	12	11	11
$\chi^{2\,a}$ (df)	107.86 (35) ***	51.31 (20) ***	52.53 (20) ***
$\chi^2_{DIFF}{}^b$(df)		0.07 (1) ^{ns}	
CFI ^{c}	0.99	1.00	0.99
WRMR ^{d}	0.84	0.84	0.89
RHI-Mentor			
N	334	No change	123
# of items	11		11
$\chi^{2\,a}$ (df)	149.43 (27) ***		49.42 (24) ***
$\chi^2_{DIFF}{}^b$(df)			
CFI ^{c}	0.95		0.97
WRMR ^{d}	0.92		0.55
RHI-Community			
N	382	382	139
# of items	14	10	10
$\chi^{2\,a}$ (df)	150.73 (33) ***	100.55 (21) ***	82.96 (15) ***
$\chi^2_{DIFF}{}^b$(df)		39.34 (3) ***	
CFI ^{c}	0.98	0.98	0.94
WRMR ^{d}	0.92	0.65	0.80

[a] This is the Satorra-Bentler chi-square statistic, which is robust to violations in the multivariate normality assumption (Satorra & Bentler, 1994). Because of the adjustment made to the calculation of this statistic, the degrees of freedom for this statistic does not indicate the number of free parameters in the model.
[b] Difference testing using robust chi-square statistics is not performed as a straightforward subtraction, as such a difference score is not distributed as a chi-square. Instead, a correction factor is used in the calculation of the difference test statistic and its associated degrees of freedom (Satorra, 2000). A significant chi-square difference test statistic represents a significant decrement in model fit from the less constrained to the more constrained model.
[c] The CFI fit index has been shown to outperform the TLI and RMSEA in models with non-normal variables. A cutoff value of 0.96 or above has been recommended for these types of models (Yu, 2002).
[d] The WRMR is the rough equivalent of the SRMR for non-normal data. A cutoff value of 0.90 or below is recommended (Yu, 2002) for a single group analysis. No simulations have been conducted to date to establish a WRMR cutoff level for a multiple groups analysis.
*** $p<0.001$

modified by omitting non-invariant items. The fit statistics for the initial and final models are given in Table 2.

RHI-Close Peer Friend. The initial confirmatory factor model of peer friendship quality did not pass the invariance test [χ^{DIFF2} (12) = 45.78, $p< 0.001$]. The freely estimated intercept for one item ("It is important to us to make our friendship grow") was nearly .5 units lower for males than for females, suggesting that men tend to endorse this item less strongly than women at the same level of relationship quality.

The intercept for a second item ("I feel positively changed by my friend") differed only by about .1 units. However, this item also

Table 2. *Model fit indices and chi-square difference scores assessing the degree of non-invariance of measurement parameters across sex.*

	Initial Invariant Model	Final Invariant Model
RHI-Close friend		
N_{Women}	399	403
N_{Men}	146	147
# of items	11	8
$\chi^{2\,a}$ (df)	138.91 (37) ***	69.46 (23) ***
$\chi^2_{DIFF}{}^{b}$(df)	45.78 (12) ***	21.16 (11) ^{ns}
CFI ^{c}	0.99	1.00
RHI-Mentor		
N_{Women}	334	335
N_{Men}	123	124
# of items	11	9
$\chi^{2\,a}$ (df)	18.14 (36) ***	80.09 (29) ***
$\chi^2_{DIFF}{}^{b}$(df)	32.34 (12) ***	12.26 (10) ^{ns}
CFI ^{c}	0.98	0.99
RHI-Community		
N_{Women}	390	No change
N_{Men}	139	
# of items	10	
$\chi^{2\,a}$ (df)	66.48 (24) ***	
$\chi^2_{DIFF}{}^{b}$(df)	13.06 (11) ^{ns}	
CFI ^{c}	0.99	

^{a} This is the Satorra-Bentler chi-square statistic, which is robust to violations in the multivariate normality assumption (Satorra & Bentler, 1994). Because of the adjustment made to the calculation of this statistic, the degrees of freedom for this statistic does not indicate the number of free parameters in the model.
^{b} Difference testing using robust chi-square statistics is not performed as a straightforward subtraction, as such a difference score is not distributed as a chi-square. Instead, a correction factor is used in the calculation of the difference test statistic and its associated degrees of freedom (Satorra, 2000). A significant chi-square difference test statistic represents a significant decrement in model fit from the less constrained to the more constrained model.
^{c} The CFI fit index has been shown to outperform the TLI and RMSEA in models with non-normal variables. A cutoff value of 0.96 or above has been recommended for these types of models (Yu, 2002).
 *** $p<0.001$

showed evidence of non-invariance with respect to the factor loading, with the freely estimated loading for males (fully standardized loading = 0.63) estimated to be somewhat weaker than the estimate for females (fully standardized loading = 0.74). This suggests that personal enhancement is a slightly more important factor in a good friendship for women than for men, although both loadings were high in the absolute sense.

A third item showed evidence of non-invariance with respect to the factor loading ("I feel understood by my friend"). The freely estimated loading for males was higher than that for females by a good margin (fully standardized loadings of .69 & .53 for males and females, respectively). This suggests that a sense of being known is an important relationship quality indicator for men, perhaps more so than for women.

We omitted each of these items in turn until

Table 3. Parameter estimates obtained in the final invariance model – RHI-Close Peer Friend.

	Women (n=403)		Men (n=147)		Common Intercept[b]
	β[a]	R²	β	R²	
1. Even when I have difficult things to share, I can be honest and real with my friend.	0.56	0.32	0.46	0.21	4.283
2. After a conversation with my friend, I feel uplifted.	0.63	0.39	0.61	0.38	4.012
3. The more time I spend with my friend, the closer I feel to him/her.	0.62	0.39	0.59	0.34	4.234
4. My friendship inspires me to seek other friendships like this one.	0.41	0.17	0.43	0.18	3.818
5. I have a greater sense of self-worth through my relationship with my friend.	0.68	0.46	0.68	0.46	3.881
6. I can tell my friend when he/she has hurt my feelings.	0.47	0.22	0.51	0.26	3.664
7. My friendship causes me to grow in important ways.	0.71	0.50	0.69	0.48	3.866
8. After spending time together, I feel energized.	0.70	0.50	0.69	0.48	3.907

[a] Fully standardized factor loadings. All loadings are significant at the $p<0.001$ level.
[b] Intercept terms are unstandardized and assume a latent factor mean of zero for the men. The common intercept can be interpreted roughly as the grand mean of the item on the original 1 to 5 response scale.

Table 4. Parameter estimates obtained in the final invariance model – RHI-Mentor.

	Women (n=335)		Men (n=124)		Common Intercept[b]
	β[a]	R²	β	R²	
1. I can be genuinely myself with my mentor.	0.62	0.39	0.67	0.45	4.361
2. I believe my mentor values me as a whole person (e.g., professionally/academically and personally).	0.66	0.43	0.57	0.33	4.685
3. My mentor's commitment to and involvement in our relationship exceeds that required by his/her social/professional role.	0.59	0.35	0.66	0.44	4.148
4. My mentor shares stories about his/her own experiences with me in a way that enhances my life.	0.66	0.44	0.68	0.47	4.086
5. I feel as though I know myself better because of my mentor.	0.68	0.46	0.72	0.52	3.686
6. I try to emulate the values of my mentor (such as social, academic, religious, physical/athletic).	0.61	0.37	0.65	0.42	3.778
7. I feel uplifted and energized by interactions with my mentor.	0.73	0.53	0.78	0.60	4.052
8. My relationship with my mentor inspires me to seek other relationships like this one.	0.56	0.32	0.55	0.30	3.706
9. I feel comfortable expressing my deepest concerns to my mentor.	0.65	0.42	0.64	0.41	3.597
Factor score determinacy[c]	0.93		0.94		

[a] Fully standardized factor loadings. All loadings are significant at the $p<0.001$ level.

[b] Intercept terms are unstandardized and assume a latent factor mean of zero for the men. The common intercept can be interpreted roughly as the grand mean of the item on the original 1 to 5 response scale.

[c] The factor score determinacy represents an index of internal consistency for the latent factor that is roughly equivalent to Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated from the raw scores.

the assumption of measurement invariance across sex was satisfied [χDIFF2 (11) = 21.16, ns]. The results of the final model are given in Table 3. Factor loadings ranged from .41 to .71 and the latent factor has good internal consistency for both men (α = .82) and women (α = .83). Item intercepts tended to be high, with an average of 3.96 on a 1 to 5 response scale. This gives evidence of a marked ceiling effect for the items in this scale. The estimated latent factor mean for women was significantly higher than for men (zDIFF =.21, p < 0.001).

RHI-Mentor. The initial mentor model also failed to pass the test of invariance [χDIFF2 (12) = 32.34, p < 0.001]. The intercept of one item ("My mentor gives me emotional support and encouragement") was freely estimated lower for males than for females by about 0.3 units, suggesting that men rated mentor's emotional support slightly lower than women with the same level of underlying relationship quality. A second item ("My mentor tries hard to understand my feelings and goals") also showed evidence of a sex difference, with men endorsing the item less highly than women at the same level of relationship quality by almost .2 units. Once these two items were omitted, the model passed the test of the invariance assumption [χDIFF2 (10) = 12.26, ns]. The results of this model are given in Table 4.

The standardized factor loadings for this model ranged from .55 to .78 and the latent factor had good internal consistency (α = .86 for women and .87 for men). The intercept terms tended to be very high, with an average of 4.01. Unlike the closest peer friendship model, the latent factor means for men and women did not differ significantly (zDIFF =.02, ns).

RHI-Community. The initial item set for relationship quality with a community required no revision to satisfy the invariance assumption [χ2 (11) = 13.06, ns]. The results of this model are given in Table 5. The item loadings were very strong, ranging from .56 to .80. The factor had good internal consistency (α = .91 for women and .88 for men). The intercepts for community relationship quality were much closer to the midrange of the response scale than were those for peer friendship and mentor relationship quality (M = 3.29) and the difference in latent factor means between men and women was not

significant (zDIFF = .01, ns).

Validity Assessment

We assessed construct validity by calculating correlations between the RHI and existing measures selected for construct similarity, doing so separately by sex. We tested for sex differences in these correlations by means of a sex by relational health interaction term in a series of linear regression models predicting the validation constructs.

Convergent validation findings (Table 6) show that the mentor Relational Health index captures some of the same variance as does the MPDQ (mutuality) and QRI (support, depth, conflict). The convergence with our validation measures corresponds most highly with our measure of support quality (r males = .63, p < 0.01; r females = .63, p < .01), somewhat less so for mutuality and depth (r males = .56 and .57, r females = .52 and .43, respectively; all ps < .01), and least for conflict quality (r males = .31, p < .05; r females = .17, ns). Additionally, convergent validity appears to be higher for men across all four validation scales than for women, although these sex differences were not statistically significant. For each of the validation measures assessing mentor relationships, there is a marked ceiling effect in the female sample, in effect of constraining the correlations between the scale scores, assuming that the underlying distributions are normally distributed.

The association between the close peer friend Relational Health index and the MSPSS-Friend Subscale was significant and in the direction hypothesized for both men and women (r males = 0.63, p < .01; r females = .37, p < .01). The strength of this association differed significantly across males and females (dR = .34, SEdR = .12, p < .01), although, again this may reflect a stronger ceiling effect among women than men, rather than a substantively informative finding. Overall, the distributions of the RHI scales have much less skew than do the validation scales, suggesting that the RHI can be used to distinguish among individuals at the higher end of the continuum as well as at the lower end.

Discussion

The current study expands on Liang et al.'s (2002a) previous article on the development of the Relational Health Indices. This study

Table 5. Parameter estimates obtained in the final invariance model – RHI-Community.

	Women (n=390)		Men (n=139)		Common Intercept[b]
	β[a]	R²	β	R²	
1. I feel a sense of belonging to this community.	0.80	0.64	0.70	0.50	3.543
2. I feel better about myself after my interactions with this community.	0.80	0.64	0.73	0.53	3.486
3. If members of this community know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.	0.67	0.45	0.63	0.40	3.131
4. I feel understood by members of this community.	0.75	0.56	0.74	0.55	3.188
5. I feel mobilized to personal action after meetings within this community.	0.62	0.39	0.58	0.33	3.214
6. It seems as if people in this community really like me as a person.	0.71	0.50	0.65	0.42	3.633
7. I have a greater sense of self-worth through my connection with this community.	0.76	0.58	0.66	0.43	3.275
8. My connections with this community are so inspiring that they motivate me to pursue relationships with other people outside this community.	0.68	0.46	0.62	0.39	3.004
9. This community has shaped my identity in many ways.	0.65	0.42	0.56	0.32	3.326
10. This community provides me with emotional support.	0.76	0.58	0.73	0.54	3.140
Factor score determinacy[c]	0.96		0.94		

[a] Fully standardized factor loadings. All loadings are significant at the $p<0.001$ level.

[b] Intercept terms are unstandardized and assume a latent factor mean of zero for the men. The common intercept can be interpreted roughly as the grand mean of the item on the original 1 to 5 response scale.

[c] The factor score determinacy represents an index of internal consistency for the latent factor that is roughly equivalent to Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated from the raw scores.

Table 6: *Correlations between selected RHI scales and convergent validation measures by sex and tests of sex differences in these associations.*

	RHI-M (Mentor Relationships)[a]		
	n	R	d_R *(SEd$_R$)*[b]
MPDQ			
male	54	0.56**	
female	156	0.52**	
			0.06 *(0.16)*
QRI-support			
male	54	0.63**	
female	155	0.63**	
			0.00 *(0.16)*
QRI-depth			
male	54	0.57**	
female	155	0.43**	
			0.19 *(0.16)*
QRI-conflict toler-ance			
male	54	0.31*	
female	155	0.17	
			0.15 *(0.16)*
	RHI-P (Close Peer Friendship)		
MSPSS-friend			
male	99	0.63**	
female	242	0.37**	
			0.34 *(0.12)* **

p< 0.05 ** *p*<0.01

[a] Scatterplots showed that two cases represented outliers in the calculation of the correlation scores with RHI-M and its validation scales among females. In these cases, the RHI-M scores were extremely low (< 2.0) and represented extreme scores in the RHI-M distribution. These were omitted in the calculation of the correlations above. No other outliers were found.

[b] Comparisons across sex of correlation coefficients were done by calculating confidence intervals about r, using Fisher's z transformations.

establishes the psychometrics of the RHI across sex which is relevant for the future assessment of Relational Health among men (for whom no previous measure of Relational Health has been created) and for comparisons between men and women. Specifically, results showed that the composite scores for each index (Mentor, Peer Friend, and Community) are internally consistent and show evidence of construct validity for both men and women. Further, the RHI's factor structure was generalizable across sex, satisfying an important prerequisite to using the Relational Health Indices for comparisons of men's and women's relationships. For this study's sample of male and female college students, we also found that the RHI's embedded dimensions (i.e., authenticity, engagement/empathy, empowerment) are highly correlated even though they are conceptually distinct (Liang et al., 2002a). The empirical relationships between each of the embedded dimensions is not surprising given that we would expect that the presence of each of these dimensions would make it more likely that other dimensions would be similarly present (i.e., high levels of authenticity in a relationship would lead to high levels of engagement or empathy). Interestingly, however, these findings stand in contrast with those from the previous study of college women at a single-sex institution where the dimensions were more statistically distinct. These different findings might be explained in that the previous study was conducted at the institution in which the RCM was first founded, perhaps contributing to a heightened awareness or sensitivity regarding these dimensions; indeed,

the ability to clearly distinguish between aspects or dimensions of relationships, such as authenticity, engagement, and empowerment, may be partly determined by level of relational sensitivity and awareness.

On the other hand, our results confirm that having a measure that examines all three relational contexts—mentor, close peer friend, and community—compared to other relational measures that assess only one relational context or domain, makes it more possible to glean the complexities of Relational Health in and across sex groups. For example, we found that whereas women rate their relationships with their best friends higher in relational quality than do men, the two groups do not differ in their ratings of mentor and community relationships. These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests that males may especially value belonging to a group or community whereas females may emphasize dyadic friendships more than do males (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997). The finding that both men and women similarly rate mentor relationships may indicate that mentor relationships, as operationalized in the RHI, are similarly thought of and valued across sex. Also, such findings suggest that the RHI, as expected, tap into the more non-sex specific aspects of mentor and community relationships.

Limitations and Future Directions

These initial psychometric data on the Relational Health Indices across sex are promising, and provide evidence for the generalizability of the factor structure and convergent validity of the Relational Health Indices in men and women. Yet, this work represents only a first foray into the development and use of measures fit for assessing men's relationships. Much additional research must be done to test the relevance and role of Relational Health in the psychological health and adjustment of men from diverse backgrounds and demographics. Suggestions for doing so follow below. First, more exploratory research followed by confirmatory work is needed to determine what is important in men's relationships compared to women's relationships, and whether the RHI adequately captures these qualities for men and women. Exploratory analyses might usefully involve

qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, in which men are asked to describe the relational qualities they most value and ways in which these are manifest in friend, mentor, and community relationships. Based on these data, new items reflecting gender specific ways of relating could be included in the RHI. Confirmatory analyses could involve correlating RHI items with other criteria, such as relationship satisfaction in men versus women.

Second, most of the data were derived through self-report instruments. Common method variance may have strengthened the observed statistical associations (Bank, Dishion, Skinner, & Patterson, 1990). Additional studies should be done to include a variety of different assessment modes (e.g., interviews, observations, and other reports), along with reports from the other member(s) of the dyadic relationships and community relationships. Third, longitudinal data are also needed to provide information about developmental change within relationships or the across-time developmental significance of close peer friend, mentor, and community relationships. Fourth, while this study provides evidence that the RHI measures can be used with a fairly broad population, the generalizibility of these findings is still somewhat limited by the relatively homogenous nature of the sample; most participants were European-American, middle class college students. We cannot speculate from the findings of this study, for instance, about racial/ethnic, age, or cultural differences in the conceptualization and implications of healthy relationships. In addition, we are limited by the ways in which we defined the relationships in our study. We have not yet examined the structure and covariates of Relational Health in other important dyadic relationships, such as employer/employee, sibling, parent/child, or marital relationships, nor do we know about other important group relationships, as in workplace, classroom, or neighborhood groups. Future studies should explore how the RHI perform with diverse relationship types and among diverse populations. Moreover, the authors are currently conducting research to compare the

psychological and behavioral correlates of Relational Health across sex and other subpopulations.

Further research is needed to elaborate the utility of the RCM concepts for research in general and to enhance our understanding of the significance of Relational Health for men compared to women. At a basic level, researchers must recognize the distinctions and gender biases that exist among measures commonly used to assess relationship closeness. Moreover, empirical work needs to explore the impact of Relational Health on the psychosocial health and adjustment of men compared to women. For example, linking Relational Health to relevant men's outcomes (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, academic and work success) may enable researchers to determine how specific aspects of Relational Health emerge within close peer friend, mentor and community relationships and ultimately influence men's adjustment.

In summary, there are a number of research directions that may prove useful in elucidating the role of Relational Health in men vs. women from various populations. The current study represents an approach for providing specific information about the generalizability of the factor structure and convergent validity of the Relational Health Indices to a men's sample in the U.S. The RHI assesses relationships with close friends, mentors, and communities that are characterized by growth-fostering characteristics as defined and operationalized by the RCM. Future research could extend this work to answer additional research questions, such as whether other relational qualities are of importance to men as opposed to women, in order to deepen our understanding of Relational Health across diverse samples and facilitate the development of more comprehensive theories of Relational Health and psychological adjustment.

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Acknowledgements

Address correspondence to

Belle Liang
Department of Counseling, Developmental and Educational Psychology
Lynch School of Education
Campion Hall 315
140 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467-1433
email: liangbe@bc.edu

Challenges Faced When Conducting Research with Young Australians with Refugee Experiences

Jane Warland, Tahereh Ziaian, Helena Stewart, Nicholas Procter
University of South Australia
Michael Sawyer
University of Adelaide
Peter Baghurst
Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide

Despite the fact that children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds have been identified to be at increased risk of a range of mental health and social adjustment problems, there is a paucity of research on their mental health status. This is because not only are there inherent difficulties working cross-culturally, such as obtaining population access and encountering language and cultural barriers, but also there are issues that arise when working with vulnerable children such as parents denying or restricting access in order to protect their child. In this paper we share some of the challenges we have encountered in the planning and data collection phases of a study of young Australians with refugee experiences (results expected 2008) and the attempts we have made to address these. In particular, implications for those considering conducting cross-cultural research will be discussed.

Background

A large Australian study of mental health and emotional problems among children and adolescents in the general population indicated that these problems affect 14-20% of all young people (Sawyer et al., 2000). However, this study did not specifically examine children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or young people with refugee experiences. A higher burden of mental health problems is likely to be present among refugee children and adolescents because they may have encountered traumas which include violence, physical and mental deprivation as well as displacement and experience of a new post-migration environment at a crucial stage in their emotional and social development (Fazel & Stein, 2002). Even if the child was born in a stable Western country they may still be exposed to sources of secondary trauma. Sigal's seminal work on second and third generation survivors of the holocast attests to the fact that severe trauma can and does impact on subsequent generations (Sigal, DiNicola & Buonvino, 1988; Sigal, 1995, 1998). There is also wide scholarly agreement that primary and secondary traumatic experiences result in

increased prevalence of mental health problems in the child and adolescent refugee population (Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005 ; Hodes, 2000; McKelvey et al., 2002 ; Silove, Sinnerbrink, Field, Manicavasagar & Steel, 1997; Steel, Silove, Phan & Bauman, 2002 ; Tousignant et al., 1999). However, these studies have tended to focus on one particular age or ethnic group or specific psychiatric disorder.

This study aimed to identify the prevalence of emotional and behavioural problems as well as protective factors and help-seeking behaviours among South Australian children and adolescents with refugee experiences. For the purposes of this study children and adolescents were considered to have had refugee experiences if either they or their parents were born overseas and arrived in Australia as a refugee. We used the UN Refugee Convention definition of a refugee (Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, 2007). This study has used a mixed methods approach. The prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Depressive Disorders will be investigated via questionnaire. These have been identified as the most commonly reported disorders affecting refugee children (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006 ; McKelvey et al., 2002 ; Slodnjak,

Kos & Yule, 2002; Sourander, 1998 ; Thomas & Lau, 2002). We will also investigate protective factors by using quality of life, strengths and difficulties and resilience scales. The tools we have used in the questionnaire are listed in Table 1 and some of the rationale for their choice is outlined later in this paper. The study has also used qualitative techniques (focus groups) to further explore the extent to which these young people were seeking and receiving both formal and informal help.

In order to thoroughly examine these issues we chose to use 3 informants; parents, adolescent children and school teachers. We aimed to recruit 600 children and adolescents from a population of refugees currently residing in South Australia. The children's cultural background was either Asian (Afghani), Eastern European (Former Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina), Middle Eastern (Iranian, Iraqi) or African (Sudanese and Liberian). These were chosen because they were among the top 20 refugee arrival groups to Australia over the past 10 years (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007). One hundred participants from each of the 6 groups provides sufficient statistical power to determine prevalence rates for PTSD and Depression as well as enable comparisons between groups.

When planning our research we were aware of many of the methodological challenges associated with cross-cultural research. Some of these difficulties relate to population access, identifying and obtaining a representative sample, cultural and language barriers, limited availability of culturally validated instruments, and wariness of parents to trust researchers (Thomas & Lau, 2002). In spite of our careful planning we encountered obstacles during the data collection stage which caused delays. Now that data collection is close to completion we consider that the difficulties we encountered during data collection are likely to be common to those conducting research in this important area. The purpose of this paper is to share our experiences in the hope that those planning research in this area will be able to avoid some of the pitfalls we encountered. Key points from this paper were summarised in Table 2.

Population access

Accessing refugees can be difficult because there is rarely a comprehensive list of people from this target population. However, this project had the advantage of access to the target population through an industry partner (IP). Whilst there are several service provision agencies who work with refugees in South Australia, we chose one which provides a settlement service for migrants and refugees in South Australia as an industry partner. Their contact with refugees during their settlement made this agency suited to be able to link us with many of the potential participants for our study.

Whilst our IP played a major role in allowing us access to potential participants we recognised that refugees who did not have contact with the IP would be unavailable to us. Therefore, in order to ensure a representative sample (as far as that is possible), we also used multidimensional approaches. These included advertising the project widely through both mainstream and ethnic media (radio and print) and promoting the project through schools, community and health services and at social gatherings of the target populations.

Many of the ethnic groups involved in our study are close knit and identify leaders to whom they will often defer. Therefore, it was important for us to notify these leaders about this study in order to gain their interest and support. This was achieved by the IP facilitating a meeting between the leaders and the research team and then sending them a follow up letter which included project details.

Cultural and language barriers

When conducting research with this population it is important to acknowledge and respect cultural differences between the researchers and the participant population (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006). These cultural barriers can take the form of differences in normative expectations linked to gender, age or standing in the community. In this study we used bilingual workers as data collectors because they had the language requirements as well as cultural knowledge and contact with potential participants. Bilingual workers employed by the IP had already developed a rapport and trust with the communities because they were helping with the process of resettlement. However other bilingual workers, not employed by the IP, were also used especially those with contacts in communities no longer in touch with the IP. These workers provided us with much more than the ability to communicate

in two or more different languages; they also brought a level of experience, skill and expertise which was vitally necessary for this research.

Bilingual worker training

When discussing the role of bilingual workers in cross-cultural research, Raval (2005) indicates that one of the problems with using these workers is that they are not adequately briefed on the role they have to undertake. Therefore, we conducted a research training session for each of the bilingual workers associated with the project prior to them commencing data collection. This session included information about the project, the expected role and responsibilities of the workers including information about how to assist families to complete the questionnaire, answering questions and queries, and troubleshooting for difficult situations. Each worker was given a worker's manual to take and use as a guide for this somewhat unfamiliar research role.

The manual included information about the project, ethical issues, methods of recruitment, and instruments used. The purpose of this training was to familiarise the workers with the research in order to carrying out the data collection in a rigorous and ethical manner. At the completion of their formal training session they were also required to sign a statutory declaration to ensure they preserved the confidentiality of the research participants.

Whilst we considered that training the bilingual workers would reduce data collection errors, it did not eliminate them altogether. This was because those who worked in a service provision agency often treated the research as an extension of their usual work, that is, they did not differentiate between their usual consultancy work and the research. In order to be sure that each worker understood what was required we asked them to 'pilot' the questionnaire on 5 participants. These questionnaires were then checked with the worker and a researcher before the worker began data collection in earnest. Where the questionnaires were complete and without error, they were used. Otherwise the questionnaires were discarded. This enabled us to kept in close contact with the workers throughout the data collection period in order to keep them on task and on track (Table 2).

Wariness of participants to participate

Refugees were typically wary of researchers (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006) and thus establishing a trusting relationship is a prerequisite for those planning research in this area (Miller, 2004). In the case of this research the bilingual workers had already established a trusting relationship with many of the participants through their association with the IP. In fact sometimes participants only agreed to take part in the research because of their prior relationship with the worker. For example, one participant wrote on their consent form, "If it wasn't for my friend's (the worker) sake I would never participate in such a survey".

We used several bilingual workers for each language/ethnic group in order to take advantage of the networks each worker had within their own community and to ensure we cast our net as widely as we could within each community to maximise our chances of gaining as representative a sample, as possible.

Potential participants were given information about the project and were advised that their privacy and status with the IP would not be affected by their involvement in the study. In spite of these assurances we still encountered some level of mistrust amongst some participants. They were especially concerned about the demographic information identifying them or that the information gained from this research would somehow be used against them. One of the chief concerns, especially from those who have been in detention, was that they would lose their permanent protection visa if the study identified them as psychologically unwell. Other participants were concerned about a series of questions asking about their satisfaction with their new life in Australia. They felt that if they expressed a very natural desire to return to their homeland, immigration officials would be notified and have grounds to deport them. Both the research team and the bilingual workers worked hard to allay these concerns. One strategy we used was fortnightly meetings with the bilingual workers. Whilst these meetings were ostensibly to exchange completed questionnaires for new, and problem solve, another important element was to foster trust between the workers and researchers. We felt this was particularly important because we were not directly approaching participants during data collection (Table 2).

Access to children

Another challenge in cross-cultural research concerns access to children. If the parents and/or their children have been traumatised, it is understandable that parents will be especially protective of their children. A questionnaire which includes sections asking about traumatic experiences which the family and the adolescent may be trying to forget can therefore be something which the parents were naturally reluctant to complete. Many times the bilingual workers needed to spend time talking to potential participants about the aims, objectives and importance of the research prior to gaining participant consent. This was very time consuming and resource laden and should be factored into estimation of time for those planning research in this area (Table 2).

Whilst some cultural customs and beliefs were anticipated in the planning stages of this research we encountered some unexpected issues. For example, we were naturally required to obtain informed consent from each informant prior to their completion of the questionnaire. However, in some cultural groups once the parents had given consent they did not consider it necessary for their adolescent child to also give consent. Furthermore, many parent participants declined to give written consent as a way of ensuring that their responses were not passed on to authorities. When we realised the extent of this problem, we approached the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for permission not to pursue the usual requirement for written consent.

Another issue we faced was parents being (understandably) protective of their children when it came time to seeking permission to interview the children's current school teachers. Some parents were concerned that once the school teachers knew their child had had refugee experiences that they would be somehow treated differently. Others simply wanted to give their child a "fresh start" in their new country. There was also a concern amongst some parents that teachers might gain the impression that the child had a mental illness if they learned that the family had participated in a study regarding mental health. About 25% of participants refused to grant permission for this aspect of the research.

On a more practical level, families with two children were given the opportunity for both

of their children to participate in the study. In order to maintain rigor and allow the parents to carefully consider their responses with respect to each child, we encouraged the parents to fill in the questionnaires on different days, ideally one week apart. If the families had three or more children then we considered that a maximum of two should be used in order not to over represent one particular family within the data set. The two children were selected for participation in the study using a "birthday technique" (Sawyer et al., 2000), whereby the two children with a birthday closest to the date of the interview were selected as the participants. However, we have encountered some cultural issues around use of this technique. Many of the cultural groups involved in this study do not celebrate birthdays and use approximate ages for their children. Still others have changed their child's birth date in the past either to make them appear older in order to go to school, or younger to allow them access to cheaper travel or accommodation whilst fleeing from their country. Furthermore, some of these cultural groups are not familiar with and do not use the Gregorian calendar. All of these issues made reliance on birthday and age somewhat problematic for us. Some families needed to randomly select two children's names from a hat rather than use the "birthday technique."

Sampling

In order to avoid putting refugees from such diverse cultural backgrounds together in a 'melting pot' during analyses, we avoided using proportional sampling and our approach was to set a 'quota' of 100 participants from each of the 6 different ethnic groups. We have established that 100 participants from each group will enable us to examine prevalence rates for the more common mental health and emotional problems. Those refugees who were interested in participating in the study were enrolled via convenience sampling until our quota of 100 participants from each of the 6 participating groups was filled. This involved close monitoring of the data collection and giving direction to the IP to concentrate their data collection in areas which were lagging as each quota was reached.

Study Promotion

We employed a number of strategies to promote and advertise our project. This involved print and electronic media as well as word-of-mouth. We produced a 'call for volunteers' flyer and developed a brochure which included information

Table 1
Instruments used for participant type

Instrument	Parent of Child 4-12 yrs	Adolescent 13-17 yrs	Parent of Adolescent 13-17 yrs	School Teacher
UCLA PTSD reaction index for DSM-IV	√ Parent Version	√ Adolescent Version	√ Parent Version	
CDI	√ Parent Version	√ Adolescent Version	√ Parent Version	√ Teacher Version
SDQ	√ Parent Version	√ Adolescent Version	√ Parent Version	√ Teacher Version
PEDsQL	√ Parent Version 8-12 only	√ Adolescent Version	√ Parent 'proxy' Version	
CD-RISC		√		
Help Seeking	√	√	√	
Demographics	√	√	√	
ESL scale score (academic achievement)				√

about the project. This flyer was distributed widely by the bilingual workers as well as members of the research team through conferences, community functions and school promotional activities. The brochure was used to promote the project through key people in the target communities and health professionals working in the ethno-specific agencies.

We also relied on word-of-mouth promotion by participants contacting others in their communities and promotion of our project through schools and community contacts.

Method

Johnson (2004) defines mixed methods as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study" (p.17).

We are using a mixed methods approach because we consider that *both* quantitative and qualitative research methods are important and useful especially when conducting this exploratory research.

There has been criticism of the use of the survey method in research with refugees (Guerin & Guerin, 2007). Although we were very concerned to try to establish a trusting relationship with the participants, we are aware that this does not necessarily mean that the information they have provided will reflect their authentic feelings, attitudes and beliefs (Miller, 2004). Reasons for this may include not wanting their community group to be perceived unfavourably, and wanting to please the researchers by giving them the data they believe they want. These were all well known limitations to this kind of research. We considered this may be especially true in our

survey because we were asking the adult to report on their perceptions of the mental health and well-being of their child. Hence we have avoided sole reliance on one research method. It may be interesting to note that the young people who participated in the focus groups do not seem to be under the same constraints as their parents and were actually keen to participate and were speaking quite freely about sensitive issues. We are therefore confident that by using a mixed methods approach that we will be able to provide a foundation from which to build an understanding of the mental health status and help seeking behaviours of child and adolescent refugees.

Instruments

The problem of translating and applying validated instruments in a cross- cultural setting is both controversial and problematic. In their seminal work on translation of health status instruments, Sartorius and Kuyken (1994) outline some reasons why this is so:

> …differences exist between cultures on their concept of health and illness, levels of literacy, reading level, concordance between written and spoken versions of language, taboo subjects, and social desirability effects. Furthermore, certain features of language, such as idiom, are very difficult to translate, and abound in some health status instruments. Indeed, considerable variability exists in most of these factors even within the same culture (pp. 3-4)

We therefore approached this problem by careful consideration of the instruments we would use and how best to translate them.

Choice of instruments

The search for appropriate instruments was a complex one. There are well known limitations to using measures which have been largely validated in developed Western countries (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006). In order to ensure that we used instruments with the best levels of validity and reliability we contacted many experts throughout the world as well as relied on the expertise already within our team. The following criteria were important in our choice of instrument:

- Simple, clear and succinct language
- Previous use in a cross-cultural setting
- Availability and price/licensing costs of instrument
- Relevant to the purpose of the study

Taking these criteria into consideration the following instruments were chosen:

- UCLA PTSD-reaction index for DSM-IV (Pynoos, Rodriguez, Steinberg, Stuber & Frederick, 1998)
- Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) (Kovacs, 2003)
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)(Goodman, Meltzer & Bailey, 2003)
- Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory (PedsQL) (Varni, 2005)
- Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Conner & Davidson, 2001, 2003)

In addition to these instruments we developed questions to collect basic demographic data as well as one section specifically asking about help-seeking behaviour. Table 1 gives a visual representation of the participant groups and instruments used for each informant.

Whilst combining all these instruments into one questionnaire should enable us to thoroughly examine the mental health status of young Australians with refugee experiences, it was perceived by some participants as a lengthy questionnaire. Our advice to those planning research with refugees is to consider ways of reducing to a bare minimum the number and size of instruments used and to factor into the budget incentives for participant time (Table 2).

Translation

There is ongoing controversy and debate as to whether a directly translated psychometric instrument captures the same meaning as the original (Mason, 2005; Sartorius & Kuyken 1994). We believed that taking a rigorous approach to translation was important. We therefore used translators who were from the target cultural groups and were also knowledgeable in the area of mental health issues. We utilised National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accredited "advanced" and "advanced senior" translators. These were used because of their awareness of the pitfalls of verbatim translation. The cost of employing these experienced translators added a considerable amount to the budget. Whilst it was a necessary expense, it is also one which should

Table 2
Checklist of hints and tips for those planning cross-cultural research

Method	Qualitative, Quantitative or Mixed?
The instruments	Aim to use short and simple instruments Consider the cross-cultural applicability of the instrument Allow plenty of time for translation and back-translation – it always takes longer than expected – particularly with languages that were tonal. Ensure that you have at least three available and qualified translators (a translator, back-translator and a back-up translator) Pilot the instruments
Population Access	Consider the potential industry partners you have available and the level of access they have to the participants. Identify your population's community leaders
The participants	Consider how you will manage access to children. Consider how you will foster trust. Consider offering incentives to participants (this may have ethical implications).
Bilingual workers	Spend time developing respect, rapport and a strong relationship with the bilingual workers. This is a particularly important consideration when not directly involved in data collection Thoroughly train the bilingual workers and where necessary provide ongoing contact and training. Monitor the work of the bilingual workers closely – they may need ongoing supervision and support to keep them on track and focussed.
Time	Aim to overestimate the time it will take to collect data

be carefully factored in to the project budget by those planning research in this area (Table 2).

Once the instruments were translated into the participants' languages we had them back-translated into English in order to validate the quality of the translation and ensure meaning was not lost (Brislin, 1970 ; Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2004). In some cases it was noticed during back-translation that the initial translation was not satisfactory and this required us to use another translator to redo the translation. This was particularly a problem in the 'tonal' languages e.g. Dinka. Obviously this is a resource intense aspect of research in this area and thus plenty of resources, both human and financial, should be allowed when budgeting for translation and/or interpreting (Table 2).

Another important consideration is that regardless of the quality of translation, a translated document cannot include the idiom and intent of the original document. For example one of the instruments we used gave the direction, "IMPORTANT! If your child is younger than 7 years of age, please tick the box below, skip this section and move to section 3." Participants from all language groups were confused by this direction. This was because whilst almost any Westernised English speaker would understand the implicit message i.e. "if your child is over 7, fill in this section", those from a non-English speaking backgrounds did not. This problem resulted in minor, but costly, revisions being made to the

questionnaires.

The translators and back-translators were rightly more concerned with translating and correcting errors in idiom, meaning and intent. However, it is also important that the translated instrument is free of grammatical and typographical errors. One way to ensure this is to pay a less expensive bilingual worker to review the questionnaire specifically to detect these kinds of errors as their presence impacts on readability.

Time taken

The questionnaire was time consuming to administer and this impacted on the study in terms of the time it took to collect data. It was also important for us to be flexible regarding how and where the questionnaires were administered. Some participants were happy to welcome the bilingual workers into their home but then spent some time prior to the administration of the questionnaire discussing practical difficulties that they were facing or exchanging social niceties. To avoid this, the bilingual workers who were working with literate families chose to drop the questionnaire off with the family and then return later to collect it. Another time saving approach we used was to invite some of the participant families to come to the IP to self complete the questionnaire either in an individual or group setting. This strategy also allowed for the provision of childcare as well as the opportunity for the adults to attend to other practicalities whilst they were there. However, these strategies were not without their problems and strict attention to detail was required in order to maintain rigor as well as participant confidentiality.

Researchers planning cross-cultural research should therefore allow plenty of time and resources and adopt more than one strategy for data collection in order to cater for the vast diversity within these cultural groups (Table2).

Conclusion

Drawing upon a strong background in cross-cultural mental health, child psychiatry and epidemiology, the research team involved in the project is uniquely positioned to investigate the mental health and well-being of refugee children and adolescents in South Australia. We have the resources and expertise of two South Australian Universities and an industry partner. We have encountered some difficulties which we have shared in order to alert those planning research in this complex and challenging area to some of the

pitfalls that may be encountered along the way.

It is expected that the study will foster significant outcomes and benefits for the refugee community and refugee health and community services. Data obtained through the project will provide mental health care providers with a new and comprehensive understanding of the mental health status, resilience and help-seeking behaviours of children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds. This will help to inform settlement planning and improve the delivery of mental health services for the refugee population in South Australia.

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Address correspondence to
Dr Jane Warland
C/o University of South Australia
City East Campus
Frome Rd
Adelaide 5001
Ph: 8302 1161
Fax: 8302 2168
email: jane.warland@unisa.edu.au

Introducing the Navigator, the Juggler, and the Analyst: A Q Profile of Undergraduate Psychology Students within an Australian University

Dawn Darlaston-Jones
University of Notre Dame

Much of the existing literature investigating non-completion in the university sector focuses on the demographic characteristics of the students while failing to adequately apply the same degree of scrutiny to the institution itself. In this paper we present the findings from the final stage of a three phase investigation into retention in a Western Australian university that utilises Q Method to understand the subjective interpretation and meaning of the student experience and how this relates to retention. The sample of 45 undergraduates was drawn from each of the four years of the psychology programme at Edith Cowan University and so provides an opportunity to examine how the student experience might change over time. This approach also offers some insight into the experience of the contemporary student in relation to the diversity of the student population, and the multiplicity of demands he or she might manage in the course of completing an undergraduate degree. Findings from this research identify three distinct profiles among the cohort: The Navigator, The Juggler, and The Analyst. Each of these profiles describes a different type of student in relation to the external demands he or she might face in addition to the role of student, and the strategies they develop to assist them in achieving their goal(s). Identifying these profiles provides the school of Psychology with the opportunity to tailor their student support systems more closely to the needs of their specific students and therefore increase overall retention rates within the programme. The findings also offer the opportunity to other schools and departments to engage in similar domain specific research in order to identify and remove potential barriers to retention within their own learning contexts.

The literature examining non-completion among university students is diverse, and in many cases contradictory. Previous research, both overseas and within Australia, has identified various factors that impact on non-completion rates, including the background characteristics of the students (Dobson, 1999; Dobson & Sharma, 1995; McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000b; Shields, 1995) as well as external and institutional factors (Long, Faust, Harris, King, Knight, & Taylor, 1994; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993). For example, the disposition of the student on entry, his or her goal commitment, and individual university experiences after entry (both social and academic) have been said to contribute to the decision to withdraw. The size of the institution, and the type and nature of the course can also influence whether or not the student remains at university (Tinto, 1993). Coupled with these factors are the needs of specific student groups and the difficulties they

might encounter as a result of their academic, social, cultural background, and personality characteristics (Evans & Farley, 1998; Evans & Peel, 1999; Evelynh, 1998; Lewis, D., 1994; Long et al., 1994; McJamerson, 1992; Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1996; Strage, 2000; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994; West, 1985; Western, McMillan, & Durrington, 1998).

In addition to this evidence, there is also a growing body of literature that suggests students are not well informed as to the nature of the course they have chosen for future employment opportunities (McInnis, Hartley, Polesel, & Teese, 2000a; McInnis et al., 2000b; Pargetter, 1999; Peel, 2000a, 2000b) making it difficult for them to see the relevance of the curriculum. Many students are also unaware of the demands of higher education in terms of workload, independent learning, and access to resources (Pargetter, 1999, 2000; Peel, 2000a, 2000b; Yorke, 2000). This applies to mature students as

well as school leavers and in many respects is understandable as they are likely to base their expectations of university on their high school experience. To further complicate the retention issue, the profile of both students and universities has changed over the past few decades as a result of the shift towards mass higher education and equity access (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes, & Wyld, 1992; Anderson, Singh, Stehbens, & Ryerson, 1998; Astin, 1993) and this change creates a range of challenges for the student and the institution which often leads to premature withdrawal.

Student withdrawal rates are often skewed because they include all 'drop outs', even temporary ones, and those transferring to other courses at other institutions (Evans, 2000; McInnis et al., 2000a; Tinto, 1993) and so the application of 'input/output' analysis offers little clarity or understanding to the issue of attrition. In Australia the figures from both the vocational training (Technical and Further Education [TAFE] Colleges) and university sectors (McInnis et al. 2000) are combined. In the USA and UK figures from two, three, and four year colleges are often combined without consideration of the diverse nature of the student population or the different demands placed on them by these different institutions (Yorke, 1999). This aggregation of data leads to confusion and conflicting interpretations over non-completion and what might be relevant to one setting might not apply to another.

In relation to the issue of non-completion these facts are a major concern because without accurate data the interpretations drawn become unreliable and it then becomes difficult to develop meaningful responses to the issue. For this reason it has been suggested that universities should be encouraged to collect their own completion data and develop a detailed understanding of their particular student body and on the basis of this information initiate a programme aimed at improving the student experience and maximising retention (McInnis et al., 2000a). In response to this call, a three stage study investigating the experiences of undergraduate students in a School of Psychology in Western Australia was conducted; this paper reports on the final stage of that project.

In terms of higher education research it is this focus on the student as a 'whole being' that has been missing, with researchers focusing their attention on individual demographic aspects or characteristics. In Q methodology the researcher is able to explore all aspects of the student experience and present each of these as part of the body of information for the respondent to deliberate and interrogate. That is, the Q set incorporates issues relating to the on campus and off campus aspects of a students life and allows the student to respond to these diverse demands to create a more complete picture of the 'experience' he or she has. The individual is then in a position to present his or her subjective reality via the sorting process which in turn allows the researcher to objectively analyse this individual perspective (Capdevilla & Stainton-Rogers, 2000; Smith, 2001). With this possibility there is the opportunity of identifying and understanding reality as it occurs for each informant and for that reality to be valued and respected in relation to the contribution it makes to our overall understanding of the phenomenon. While the intention here is to examine issues around the concept of 'retention' we recognise that this term is not unproblematic in that it assumes all enrolling students should be retained by the university; that any form of non-completion is undesirable. This is not how the authors view the issue of retention, indeed for some students university is not the right course of action and so a deliberate decision to leave is in fact a positive change of direction. However, the focus for us, (in our teaching, the pastoral care we offer, and of this paper) is the student who has a desire and capacity to succeed but for whom the university experience is so unsatisfying that he or she feels compelled to leave in order to removes him/herself from a negative environment.

Objectives of this study

The Q study had three main objectives, the first of which was to examine in a structural manner the diversity of experiences among the student cohort in relation to the factors effecting retention. Using Q allowed the commonalities between informants to be explicitly identified as well as examining the

divergence among student experiences. The second aim was to examine whether the policies and teaching and learning practices within the institution affected student retention. Finally, it was anticipated that the resulting factors would provide some clarity to the complex issue of retention and provide a foundation that could contribute to the development of more appropriate policies and services to assist students in achieving their goals.

Method

Informants

The total sample comprised 44 students with seven men and 37 women, which is representative of the gender ratio among psychology students at ECU. Two informants were international students (1 in second year and 1 in fourth year) and one student had English as a second language (ESL) (second year).

Procedure

The two earlier stages of the research comprised a series of focus groups and individual in-depth interviews. From these transcripts a list of statements was developed that were representative of the range of views and opinions relative to retention as expressed by these students. These responses were analysed and collapsed to 120 statements with further reduction by means of thematic analysis resulting in a final Q-sample of 45 statements (Appendix A). The Q-sample was presented to informants in the form of a set of small printed laminated cards about the size of a credit card. Each card was numbered and included one of the 45 statements.

The Q-Sort was conducted with each informant individually and lasted approximately 30 – 45 minutes. Informants were asked to sort and rank the 45 statement cards according to the instruction "most important to me" to "most unimportant to me". To aid informants in the sorting activity an array chart in the form of a large, printed sheet was provided. The array was designed as a basic rectangle of nine columns and five rows totalling 45 squares with one square for each statement of the Q-sample. The columns of the array chart were arranged as a Likert-type scale, numbered from –4 (most unimportant), through zero, to +4 (most important), which allowed the informants to prioritise the statements in terms of the issues that were most important to the individual in relation to his or her experience of being a student.

Comments or observations made by the informants during the sorting process were noted. In addition, a brief interview was conducted following completion of the Q-sort to clarify the reasons for the placement of the cards. This allowed issues that emerged during the sorting process to be explored as well as to discuss the relevance of themes.

Results

Using PQMethod software the data were analysed using Principle Components Analysis (PCA) and Varimax rotation. A three factor solution offered the greatest clarity of interpretation and this was ultimately selected as the 'best fit' for the data. These factors were named *The Navigator, Juggler & Analyst,* to reflect the characteristics of the students who loaded onto them. Three statements failed to discriminate between the three factors and in Q terms these are described as 'consensus items'. These are presented in Table 1 and this is followed by an interpretation of each factor.

Interpretation

Interpretation of the factors was conducted in accordance with the process outlined by Kitzinger (1999). In analysing the Q Sort, both the factor loadings and the interviews with each student are considered, thus providing a deeper insight into and explanation of the factor outcomes. All three factors comprised students from each of the four year levels, both genders, and full and part-time study. There were no significant differences between the profiles in relation to hours in paid employment or personal contexts that might be regarded as constraints to university success. This indicates that individual demographic characteristics are not associated with the issues that students identified as being important to them, because for this to be true each factor would be identified by similar types of students. For example, if age were a significant factor in its own right then we would have expected that all the school leavers would load onto a single factor with the mature age students loading onto a separate and different factor. This was not the case in this study with each factor being defined by a mix of ages, genders, and mode of study.

Table 1
Consensus items showing factor rankings and scores

		Factors					
Statement and identification number		1		2		3	
		rank	score	rank	score	rank	score
8*	There are no barriers between students and teaching staff	0	0.02	-1	-0.32	-1	0.01
23*	There is not much of an atmosphere on campus, people come to class and then go, no-one seems to stay and chat.	-4	-1.03	-3	-1.06	-3	-1.20
41	The departmental secretaries are a valuable resource; they either know the answer or know where I can find it.	0	-0.24	-1	-0.35	-2	-0.72

NB: all items are non-significant at .01 and items marked '*' are also non-significant at .05

Factor 1: The Navigator

Seventeen students loaded onto this factor and it was the largest of the three factors. It was defined by 7 first year students, 3 second year, 4 third year, and 3 fourth year students. Their ages ranged from under twenty to fifty years, both the international students loaded onto this factor and there were 4 men represented. All the students were enrolled full-time. Defining statements for this factor are shown in Table 2.

The students who loaded onto this factor can be described as being highly self-motivated and independent, they are committed to succeeding at university and they are prepared to do whatever is necessary to achieve their goals. The most important statement for this group was number 5. "*To succeed you need a goal – it can be just to get the best marks you can or it can be to go all the way to a PhD – but you need a goal.*" This statement typifies the types of responses students gave when asked what helps them to continue. While these students all described a number of highly negative experiences related to their student role during the interview process, they sought to identify the lesson inherent in the situation and move on from it rather than allow it to affect their progress. To illustrate this, one student described her response to receiving a lower than expected mark for an assignment in which she had expected to do well. Although her initial response to her result was shock, she quickly

turned this into an opportunity to learn and made an appointment with the coordinator to discuss the issue. The outcome of that interview was a much clearer understanding not only of the content of the assessment but of the course as a whole. Hence the selection of the term *Navigator* to describe this group of students; they sought to navigate their way through university by overcoming, mediating, or avoiding difficulties that might distract them from their goal of completion.

One of the other statements to be ranked very highly (+4) by these students was number 18. "I can cope because I have the unconditional support of someone close to me." When asked to elaborate on this issue, students described a person who was prepared to do anything in order to enable the student to concentrate on study. The support person (or persons) was most often a partner or parent but could also be a friend. One student described her unconditional support as coming from a network consisting of her parents, her partner with whom she lived, and her best friend who was also studying the same course. Having access to such a range of supports that were unconditional enabled this student to cope with the demands of university study, paid employment, and a serious medical condition. Another student described how her partner encouraged her to resign from her job so that she could study full-time, even though this would require him to work longer hours in order to meet their financial needs.

Table 2

Defining Statements for Factor 1

Statement	Factors					
	1		2		3	
	Rank	**Score**	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
5. To succeed you need a goal - it can be just	**4**	**2.01***	4	1.34	3	0.87
3. University has been a positive experience	**4**	**1.76***	1	0.29	3	0.83
18. I can cope because I have the	**4**	**1.76***	0	-0.06	3	0.91
26. My friends on campus are equally	**3**	**1.26***	2	0.44	-3	-1.59
24. It requires good time management to	**2**	**0.67**	4	1.84	3	1.07
37. I access all the support services I need to	**2**	**0.29***	-2	-0.58	-2	-0.48
19. Computer access is easy, I never have	**1**	**0.22***	-3	-0.91	3	1.02
7. There is a strong collegial feeling on	**1**	**0.12***	-3	-1.11	-4	-1.64
15. the admin staff in psychology are very	**1**	**0.11**	2	0.51	-2	-0.65
44. For me to be able to cope with the	**0**	**0.05***	4	2.03	-3	-0.78
30. It is my study buddies on campus that	**0**	**-0.11***	2	0.62	-4	-1.91
11. I find it easy to access advice and	**0**	**-0.22**	-2	-0.69	4	1.17
38. The support services on campus are	**-1**	**-0.28***	-2	-0.87	1	0.44
29. Learning how the use the library was a	**-1**	**-0.45**	0	0.00	2	0.69
39. There is a need for the university to offer	**-2**	**-0.59***	0	-0.03	1	0.41
34. the lecturers have no time for students,	**-2**	**-0.70**	-4	-1.13	0	0.32
25. I don't need a social element to	**-2**	**-0.71***	-4	-1.60	-3	-1.60
4. I feel as if I am a role model for others by	**-3**	**-0.83***	-4	-1.37	-4	-1.74
9. I found it easy to make friends with other	**-3**	**-0.91***	-4	-1.99	-4	-1.66
1. I feel overwhelmed by the demands of	**-4**	**-1.05***	1	0.22	0	0.39
43. Constantly worrying about money is a	**-4**	**-1.84***	3	1.02	0	0.23
31. I have to work to support myself, this	**-4**	**-1.86***	3	1.28	-1	-0.07
20. Financial difficulties make studying	**-4**	**-2.15***	1	0.09	-2	-0.54

P < .05 ; Asterisk (*) Indicates Significance at P < .01 Both the Factor Q-Sort Value and the Normalized Score are Shown.

It is the unconditional nature of this support that makes it important. There is much literature on the benefits of social support (Astin, 1993; Lafreniere, Ledgerwood, & Docherty, 1997; West, Hore, Bennie, Browne, & Kermond, 1986) but none that discusses the issue of conditionality. There is often an expectation of reciprocity in the provision of social support even if this is implied rather than stated. What these students are describing however is quite different to that presented in the literature. There is an explicit unconditional status to the support they receive.

The students who loaded onto factor one identified the specific roles that different groups of friends played into their lives by ranking the following statement (number 26.) at +3 "My friends on campus are equally as important to me as my friends off campus but they fulfil different roles." This is an indication of how the students manage their role as a student and the relationships they have on and off campus. On campus friends tend to take the form of a study group such that they work together on assignments, help each other in gaining research materials, sit together in class and engage in informal and formal discussions related largely to their course of study. Off campus friends are likely to be longer term relationships from different stages of the person's life and fulfil the role of social interaction and emotional support. That is not to say that these role boundaries are absolute or that a student might not discuss study issues with a friend who was not also a fellow student but as a general rule these Navigator students made a clear distinction regarding roles and boundaries. It would appear that this is a mechanism for maintaining established relationships by not contaminating them with the person's new role of 'student'.

The amount of time students spend in paid employment was an additional demand that reduced the time available to students but with 40% of full-time students in Australia working a minimum of 14 hours a week (McInnis & Hartley, 2002; McInnis et al., 2000a; McInnis et al., 2000b) it is becoming an important issue in the lives of undergraduates. Given that all but two of the students who loaded onto factor one were engaged in some paid employment it is interesting that the statements relating to financial pressures were all placed at the -4 position. On face value this appears somewhat contradictory as logic would dictate the student was working due to need rather than desire and if this were true it must impact negatively on the amount of time available for study and other activities. In raising this apparent contradiction with students it appears that while paid employment is a necessary fact of life for these students it was accepted as something that needed to be managed. Therefore, rather than seeing it as a

barrier to success, the students accepted and managed it as it as part of their schedule in the same way as they scheduled their classes.

Students also mentioned the benefits associated with paid employment even if they were not currently employed in an area related to psychology. For example, one student who worked in the retail sector described the time spent at the store as an opportunity to 'tune out' from psychology and studying and to engage in something completely unrelated to university. For this particular student, while paid employment encroached into study time he was able to reframe it into a positive and used his employment hours as a form of mental relaxation. In ranking the financial statements as unimportant, these students are stating that they have found the means of converting a potential barrier into a positive, which reinforces the image of the motivated goal driven achiever that characterises the Navigator.

In summary, the students who characterise the Navigator are very different individually, they are not all of a similar age or background and they do not all have similar needs or goals. However, they are similar in that they have a goal and they are prepared to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to achieve it. They all share the unconditional support of at least one person in their lives, and they have the ability to reframe a barrier as an opportunity to overcome a challenge.

Factor 2: The Juggler

This factor comprised twelve informants: Four 1st year students, 3 in each of second and third year and 2 fourth year students. They ranged in age from under 20 to 50 years and there were two men in this group. Three students were studying part time and there were no international students represented in this group. The defining statements for this factor are presented in Table 3.

The most important issue for this group of students was the difficulty associated with balancing the conflicting demands on their time. The statement with the highest factor score ranked at 4 was number 2 "It is difficult to juggle the demands of work, university, and family and friends" and this was separated from statement number 44 "For me to be able

to cope with the demands of uni, work and family, I need flexibility in my learning environment" by only .01 which indicates both the problem and the solution for these students. Juggling competing demands is the problem and flexibility on the part of the administration and/or lecturing staff was seen as the solution.

Scrutiny of the personal context of the students who loaded onto this factor identified individuals with limited or non-existent personal support systems. For example, there are two students who while in long term stable relationships have no extended family to draw on for assistance with child care. This results in each couple relying on each other and expensive casual child care centres for help. If the child becomes unwell and unable to attend the child care centre it means that one of the parents has to adjust an already tight schedule to accommodate the additional task of caring for a sick child. This might result in the student having to miss class or requesting an extension for submission of an assessment, and unless the lecturer is willing to accept the reason as legitimate it can result in penalties being applied to the student. With an extended support network of grandparents, aunts, uncles, or friends who might be able to help in an emergency this would not necessarily be such an issue for the student.

Another example drawn from the students in this profile is the single student who engages in paid employment to support herself. This student reported that many of the difficulties she experienced during her degree arose as a result of conflict between class times and paid employment. The necessity of paid work becomes paramount if you are relying on a single income and work commitments might require the student to miss classes or request extensions on assignment deadlines or it might be that an evening class time would be more convenient as it would allow the student to be employed during the day and study at night. Some staff members understand and recognise the reality of these circumstances and will accept employment related excuses as valid reasons for absence or extension requests but some do not partly due to the fact that the relevant university policy requires documentary evidence in support of such requests. Few students would be willing to approach employers for a note for their teachers

explaining the need for an absence and I would imaging that few employers would readily comply even if the request were made. Consequently, the policy creates a belief among some academics that the only legitimate reason for class absence is medical. This particular student reported that she was advised by a lecturer to assess her commitment to studying and if she is unable to commit the required time to attending class and meeting deadlines then perhaps university study is not a valid option. This response from the lecturer illustrates Opotow's (1990) arguments regarding moral exclusion in that by reflecting the responsibility for success solely onto the student the mechanism is created for denying our own responsibility as educators. In effect the student is removed from our scope of justice (Opotow, 1996) and therefore our role in assisting the student to achieve his or her goals is abrogated. While there is of course the need for the student to commit to his or her studies there also needs to be a realistic response to student absences and requests for extensions. This is especially relevant given the economic reality that most students need to engage in some form of paid employment while studying, and many have family responsibilities that cannot be ignored in order to meet university deadlines.

By not accommodating reasonable requests for flexibility the lecturer/administrator is contributing to a climate of systemic oppression. Failure to recognise that social and economic disadvantage impacts on a student's performance at university reinforces the marginalisation of that student (Darlaston-Jones, 2003; Darlaston-Jones, Cohen, & Pike, 2002; Freire, 1998; Wink, 1997) and can result in psychological oppression (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). The net result of this lack of flexibility is that the student can become disillusioned with study, ridden with self-doubt, and internalise the failure as a lack of ability, and in extreme cases this can ultimately lead to non-completion. These responses were reflected by some of the students in this study as they talked about their reactions to situations and circumstances.

The students who loaded onto factor two were all committed students evidenced by the

Table 3
Defining statements for Factor 2

Statement	Factors					
	1		**2**		3	
	Rank	Score	**Rank**	**Score**	Rank	Score
2. It is difficult to juggle the demands of	-2	-0.63	**4**	**2.04***	-1	-0.42
44. For me to be able to juggle the demands	0	0.05	**4**	**2.03***	-3	-0.78
24. It requires good time management to	2	0.67	**4**	**1.84***	3	1.07
5. To succeed you need a goal – it can be	4	2.01	**4**	**1.34**	3	0.87
31. I have to work to support myself, this	-4	-1.86	**3**	**1.28***	-1	-0.07
13. Teaching staff are very supportive and	2	0.79	**3**	**1.18**	1	0.51
22. Getting a good grade is a real motivator,	4	1.85	**3**	**1.13***	4	2.08
43. Constantly worrying about money is a	-4	-1.84	**3**	**1.02***	0	0.23
30. It is my study buddies on campus that	0	-0.11	**2**	**0.62***	-4	-1.91
15. The admin staff in psychology are very	1	0.11	**2**	**0.51**	-2	-0.65
26. My friends on campus are equally as	3	1.26	**2**	**0.44***	-3	-1.59
42. The quality of the teaching is a	3	1.14	**1**	**0.43***	4	1.15
3. University has been a positive experience	4	1.76	**1**	**0.29**	3	0.83
20. financial difficulties make studying	-4	-2.15	**1**	**0.09***	-2	-0.54
29. Learning how to use the library was a	-1	-0.45	**0**	**0.00**	2	0.69
39. there is a need for the university to offer	-2	-0.59	**0**	**-0.03**	1	0.41
21. Once I learnt the ropes or understood the	3	1.16	**0**	**-0.04***	4	1.08
18. I can cope because I have the	4	1.76	**0**	**-0.06***	3	0.91
11. I find it easy to access advice and	0	-0.22	**-2**	**-0.69**	4	1.17
38. The support services on campus are	-1	-0.28	**-2**	**-0.87***	1	0.44
19. Computer access is easy, I never have	1	0.22	**-3**	**-0.91***	3	1.02
7. There is a strong collegial feeling on	1	0.12	**-3**	**-1.11**	-4	-1.64
34. The lecturers have no time for students,	-2	-0.70	**-4**	**-1.13**	0	0.32
12. there are plenty of support structures on	1	0.11	**-4**	**-1.25***	0	0.27

P < .05 ; Asterisk (*) Indicates Significance at P < .01 Both the Factor Q-Sort Value and the Normalized Score are Shown.

fact that statement number 5 "To succeed you need a goal - it can be just to get the best mark you can or it can be to go all the way to a PhD – but you need a goal" and statement number 22 "Getting a good grade is a real motivator it helps you to stay on track" were ranked +4 and +3 respectively. The fact that these statements were ranked as highly as they were indicates that these students are no less committed to achievement than those students who loaded on the Navigator factor. So the call for flexibility is not an attempt on their part to abrogate their responsibilities as a

student, rather it is a request for the university to recognise the realities currently facing students. The student body has changed dramatically in a relatively short period of time and while universities are adjusting to the changing demographic this is occurring far more slowly resulting in a lack of fit (Chevaillier, 2002; Wapner & Demick, 2000) between the university and its client base.

This lack of fit is also reflected in the teaching and learning expectation of students and staff. Students ranked statement 13 "Teaching

staff are very supportive and understanding if students have difficulties" at +3 and this has relevance to the discussion above. On first reading it appears to negate the earlier argument for if staff are already "supportive and understanding" then where is the problem? On discussing this issue with students it became clear that being supportive and understanding did not always translate into action. So while the staff member concerned might empathise with the situation the student faced it did not necessarily follow that he/she would take any action (e.g. grant the extension request) to assist the student.

Extension and deferral of assessment is only one aspect of flexibility of course although often it is the biggest issue for students who are trying to manage very difficult situations. Other important issues include scheduling of classes; student consultation times; access to services and resources; and university opening times. Scheduling classes in the evenings and arranging for on-line payment options or offering early morning or late night services to accommodate students who cannot attend campus during office hours would all contribute to greater flexibility in the learning environment and help students to meet their goals. There is a move to schedule some classes in the evenings but this is often, understandably, met with resistance from staff who feel disadvantaged in terms of the security aspects of working late and in relation to pay and conditions not to mention their own ability to juggle their personal and professional lives. This aspect emphasises the need to view the issue of retention holistically because arbitrary changes to the system can have negative outcomes for other sectors of the university community.

In conclusion, the students who loaded onto factor two are characterised by a high level of motivation and commitment to their study but who require a greater degree of flexibility on the part of the university and teaching staff. It is likely that these students have limited access to support networks and are highly self-reliant. They are constantly reassessing and re-prioritising the many demands they are faced with and this reassessment might occur on a daily basis depending on the circumstances. This means that at any given time the student needs to restructure his or her plans in order to deal with

an unforeseen event such as a sick child or the employer who insists he/she work late. Often this shift in emphasis will result in study taking a lower priority to other events for a period of time, but this does not translate into a lack of commitment on the part of the student and no negative inference regarding the quality of the student should be made. In fact it is possible that juggling these conflicting demands contributes to these students becoming even more committed and motivated to succeed in spite of the personal circumstances they face.

Factor 3: The Analyst

This factor was defined by 9 students and was the smallest of the three factors. Significant statements for this factor are presented in Table 4. Four of the students who loaded onto this factor were in first year, there was 1 in each of 2nd and 4th year and 3 students were in their third year of study. All the students in this group were women and they ranged in age from under 20 to fifty years. Only one student in this group was studying part-time and there were no international students represented. The second year student was from a Non-English speaking background (NESB).

The students who loaded onto this factor are characterised by a willingness to actively seek external supports to assist them achieving their goals. They actively engage with their tutors and lecturing staff and are not afraid to ask for help. The only two statements to be ranked at +4 were number 40 "I can ask my tutor anything, he/she is always willing to offer assistance" and number 11 "I find it easy to access advice and assistance in choosing my course and/or units" both of which clearly illustrate a willingness to seek help. Statements 24 "It requires good time management to successfully manage the different roles in my life" and 5 "To succeed you need a goal - it can be just to get the best mark you can or it can be to go all the way to a PhD – but you need a goal" were ranked at +3 and both attest to the commitment of these students so once again there is a determination to achieve and to succeed in pursuing their degree. This is reinforced by the placing of statement 3 "University has been a positive experience for me" at the +3 position. Like the students in factor one, these students too receive unconditional support from someone close to them with the statement referring to this

aspect (# 18) being ranked at +3. This again emphasises the importance of the unconditional nature of this support and its role in retention cannot be overstated.

Table 4
Defining Statements for Factor Three

	Factors					
Statement	1		2		**3**	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	**Rank**	**Score**
41. I can ask my tutor anything he/she is	2	0.86	2	0.52	**4**	**1.43***
11. I find it easy to access advice and	0	-0.22	-2	-0.69	**4**	**1.17***
24. It requires good time management to	2	0.67	4	1.84	**3**	**1.07**
19. Computer access is easy, I never have	1	0.22	-3	-0.91	**3**	**1.02***
18. I can cope because I have the	4	1.76	0	-0.06	**3**	**0.91***
5. To succeed you need a goal – it can be	4	2.01	4	1.34	**3**	**0.87**
3. University has been a positive experience	4	1.76	1	0.29	**3**	**0.83**
45. Not being able to access services when I	-2	-0.66	-2	0.79	**2**	**0.78***
36. I feel I was unprepared for university, I	-3	-0.98	-3	-1.00	**2**	**0.69***
29. Learning how to use the library was a	-1	-0.45	0	0.00	**2**	**0.69***
32. There is a lack of consistency in the	-1	-0.30	-1	-0.25	**2**	**0.67***
33. I have no idea where my degree will take	-3	-0.72	-1	-0.55	**1**	**0.58***
28. We need a one-stop-shop where we can	-1	-0.26	-1	-0.33	**1**	**0.48***
38. The support services on campus are	-1	-0.28	-2	-0.87	**1**	**0.44***
39. There is a need for the university to offer	-2	-0.59	0	-0.03	**1**	**0.41**
34. The lecturers have no time for students	-2	-0.70	-4	-1.13	**0**	**0.32***
43. Constantly worrying about money is a	-4	-1.84	3	1.02	**0**	**0.23***
17. Student Central (campus admin) is very	-1	-0.56	-2	-0.86	**0**	**0.14***
31. I have to work to support myself, this	-4	-1.86	3	1.28	**-1**	**-0.07***
6. Learning is more than just sitting in a	4	1.36	4	1.32	**-1**	**-0.15***
20. Financial difficulties make studying	-4	-2.15	1	0.09	**-2**	**-0.54***
15. The admin staff in psychology are very	1	0.11	2	0.51	**-2**	**-0.65***
10. I develop a timetable each semester that	2	0.23	2	0.59	**-2**	**-0.74***
44. For me to be able to cope with the	0	0.05	4	2.03	**-3**	**-0.78***
27. you need a support network on campus,	3	0.98	3	1.07	**-3**	**-0.94***
26. My friends on campus are equally	3	1.26	2	0.44	**-3**	**-1.59***
7. There is a strong collegial feeling on	1	0.12	-3	-1.11	**-4**	**-1.64**
14. As soon as a staff member called me by	1	0.06	0	-0.14	**-4**	**-1.66***
30. It is my study buddies on campus that	0	-0.11	2	0.62	**-4**	**-1.91***

P < .05 ; Asterisk (*) Indicates Significance at P < .01 Both the Factor Q-Sort Value and the Normalized Score are Shown

Essentially it appears that these students demonstrate a high level of personal insight and self-awareness; they are willing and able to critically reflect on their abilities and to seek support or guidance in the areas they perceive to be weak. This ability to critically assess self is the key for this group in achieving their goals. Once an issue is identified the student seeks assistance from the appropriate person or department and engages in action to rectify the problem. Therefore the term 'Analyst' illustrates their ability to reflect on their abilities identify their needs and explore opportunities for these to be met. These students are also inclined to double check their interpretation and understanding of course content, even when convinced they are right, in order to ensure accuracy and so they are the ones most likely to seek consultation times with their teaching staff and to ask questions in class. In this way, the support seeking nature of the student is a positive for both the student and the staff members with whom they have contact. It would be inaccurate to interpret the outcomes from these students as 'needy' or 'dependent' because this fails to do justice to the degree of self-awareness and critique that characterises this group.

It is interesting to note the statements that define the negative end of the scale for this factor. In the -3 position there are 3 statements, numbers 44, 27 and 26 which refer to the functionality of the library, the need for a study group as a support mechanism on campus, and the role played by friends on and off campus respectively. The role of the library would normally be seen as integral to the success of university students but given the proximity of the four public universities in Perth to each other, and the availability of on-line access to full text journal articles, difficulties with the on-site library were viewed as a problem to be solved rather than as a major barrier. Given that this group of students can be described as 'support seeking' it seems surprising that the notion of a study group is rejected by them. Speaking with this group it seems that they view the idea of a study group with suspicion, feeling others might not share their commitment to study and therefore the 'study' session might

deteriorate into socialising. The following quotes from these students illustrate the point:

I came here to study not to make new friends.

I'm not here to party.

I prefer to study alone.

The statements placed at -4 (7, 14, & 30) relate to the collegial atmosphere on campus, staff members calling students by name and the support provided by 'study buddies'. Given the comments above it is not surprising that this group of students rejects the need for a collegial atmosphere of the need for staff to know them by name. However, this is contrary to much of the literature around student retention, almost all of which regards a friendly supportive environment and informal interactions with staff to be essential to student success (see for example, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; see for example, Tinto, 1988; Tinto, 1993, 1995, 1997). The results from this group of students emphasise the need for a more detailed contextual examination of retention in higher education. If universities exert time and resources into developing a collegial environment for students who do not require it, or worse still mandate participation in study groups such as Tinto's model of Learning Communities it is likely to trigger exactly what such a strategy is intending to avoid, namely non-completion.

In summary, although this group of students is numerically the smallest in the study they could arguably be the strongest in their determination to succeed. They demonstrate high levels of commitment to their studies to the extent that they resist any involvement in on-campus roles that might lead to social interaction that could distract them from their goal. They employ critical self reflection in an effort to identify their strengths and weaknesses and are proactive in remediation of these perceived deficits. Finally these students also have at least one person close to them from whom they receive unconditional support. It might be that the combination of unconditional support and the ability for critical self reflection is the key to success for this group. Having someone on whom the students can rely totally is likely to contribute to the confidence required to engage in self reflection and critique.

Non-Significant Sorts

There were six students who failed to load significantly on any of the factors and factor scores for these students are presented in Table 5. Three of these students were in their third year of study and there was one student in each of 1st 2nd and 4th years. Their ages ranged from under 20 to fifty years, all were full-time domestic students and all but one were women. While none of these sorts reached significance on any of the three factors they share some of the characteristics of each of the other three groups. For example, two of the students ranked statement 18 (unconditional support) at +4, two ranked it at +3 and two ranked it at +1, which seems to support the importance of the role of unconditional support for this group as well as for factors 1 and 3.

All these students appeared to be highly motivated to succeed and were extremely structured in their time management. Half of the students with non-significant sorts referred to the need for a strong collegial environment while the others preferred to study alone and had no desire to mix with other students outside of class time even for study purposes. While the personal circumstances of all six of these students were very different, there were some similarities in terms of the complexity of their lives. Four of the six were in paid employment working an average of 20 hours per week each and one of these four was also a single parent. Such demands on time must create a difficult workload even for the most organised and motivated student.

Conclusion

While the characteristics that defined each factor were very different there were some similarities across the three factors and also those students who failed to load significantly on a single factor. First, being in receipt of unconditional support from at least one source seems to play a crucial role in retention and it is the unconditional nature of this support that makes it so important. Most support structures that students have access to require some degree of reciprocity either at an implicit or explicit level. For example, fellow students will often willingly assist a peer but there is an unspoken expectation that the favour will be returned should the need arise. Unconditional support however, is a unique relationship because there is no expectation of pay back.

The second issue to note is that all the students demonstrated a very high commitment to their study and were determined to succeed. While the mechanisms employed by each group to achieve their goals might differ, the level of commitment was consistent for all students in the informant cohort. There is a great deal of literature that emphasises the roles and responsibilities of the students in retention and often this literature suggests that non-completion is the result of a failure on the part of the student to meet the standards required (Etter, Burmeister, & Elder, 2000; Evans, 2000; Evans & Peel, 1999; Lewis, I., 1984; Long, Carpenter, & Hayden, 1995; McClelland & Kruger, 1989; McInnis, 1998; McInnis et al., 2000a; McInnis & James, 1999; McInnis et al., 2000b). The results from this study suggest that there also needs to be a

Table 5
Non-defining sorts by factor

	Factors		
Informant ID #	1 Score	2 Score	3 Score
7	0.2199	0.2336	0.3085
11	0.3203	0.4390	0.4354
18	0.0955	0.0617	-0.1277
25	0.3749	0.3985	0.1516
30	0.0242	0.2900	0.0185
34	0.4168	0.4164	0.0497

level of commitment from the university to the students to assist him or her to achieve.

There also needs to be a recognition that students vary in their needs and so a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will only satisfy a certain sector of the student body and fail to meet the needs of others. Naturally it is not possible to tailor services to each individual student either. The results from this study though indicate that it might be possible to profile the student body to identify key characteristics which in turn could be used to build some degree of flexibility into existing structures. In this way it should be possible to better meet the needs of the student while still ensuring fiscal responsibility on the part of the university. It is also important to recognise the degree of change that has occurred in recent times in terms of the types of students accessing higher education. Their lives and circumstances are far more varied and complex than previous generations and it is inevitable that university structures and policies have not moved as quickly as they might have done in reflecting the demographic shift of the student population.

The problem with any form of categorisation arises when the members of a group are viewed as homogenous. While each of the profiles identified here have a number of internal consistencies there remains the need to remember that each factor is constituted by individuals and so each factor is also heterogeneous. Herein lays the tension: for policy and educational practice to be effective for the students they are designed to serve, researchers and educators must recognise the individuality and difference within categories in addition to acknowledging the central claim of difference between groups (Nozaki, 2000).

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Acknowledgements

Address correspondence to

Dr. Dawn Darlaston-Jones
School of Arts & Sciences
University of Notre Dame
19 Mouat Street
FREMANTLE
Western Australia
Ph: +61 8 9433 0567
email: ddarlaston-jones@nd.edu.au

The Transition Experience of Australian Students to University: The Importance of Social Support.

Belinda Urquhart
Julie Ann Pooley
Edith Cowan University

The transition to university for many university students has the potential to be stressful requiring the student to make significant adjustments to their personal, social and academic lives. Research identifies the importance of social support in easing the transition for these students however much of this research has implied the role of social support through their use of social support scales rather than from understanding the transition experience from the students themselves. In addition few studies understand the experience of transition in the Australian tertiary sector. The present study sought to redress this by interviewing Australian students about their experience as a new first year university student. Five themes emerged from qualitative interviews (social support, expectation, time management, transition issues and emotions) indicating they are important contributors in enabling these participants to successfully adjust to university study and life. A number of avenues exist for programs to support first year students and future research in this area.

It is often remarked that the only constant in today's world is change, therefore change is a common occurrence for everyone throughout life. One avenue for understanding change and how change impacts is through transition. Transition refers to "periods of change, disequilibrium and internal conflict about gains and losses that occur between periods of stability, balance, and relative quiescence" (Cowan, 1991, p.7). Individuals may experience a number of major transitions during their lifetime such as change of school, career change, or geographic relocation. During such a transition an individual is forced to take an unfamiliar path. This road of unfamiliarity can place the individual in a state of heightened vulnerability as he/she attempts to negotiate the demands of the transition and regain some sense of stability in the new environment (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986).

Given the high levels of stress an individual is faced with when going through a transition, and the immense pressure that is placed on their coping resources, one may anticipate that support from family and friends during this period would be invaluable (Moyle & Parkes, 1999). The type of support found to be beneficial during transition is social support. Social support is defined as "perceived instrumental or expressive provisions supplied to an individual by confiding partners, social networks, and the greater community" (Jay & D'Augelli, 1991, p.96).

An aspect of social support that has received much attention over the past 20 years is the role that social support plays during life transitions, particularly the transition of late adolescence from high school to university (e.g., Jay & D'Augelli, 1991; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000; Zea, Jarama, & Bianchi, 1995). This transition period presents an ideal situation to study the importance of social support on the transitional experience, as these students navigate their way through a number of challenges ranging from changes to their social networks to adjusting their daily routine (Tao et al., 2000).

A critical element of transition is the need it presents for change, hence a central task for students to undertake when making the transition from high school to university is adjusting to their new environment. Specifically it is suggested that there are three important areas of adjustment for students commencing tertiary studies and they include academic, social, and personal/emotional adjustment (Schwitzer, Griffen, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Evidence from the research

literature (e.g., Tao et al., 2000) suggests social support plays a fundamental role in aiding adjustment to university. In terms of significant contributors of social support, faculty members, peers, and family members are all potential sources of support for students (Weir & Okun, 1989).

In examining the relationship between social support and university adjustment Zea et al. (1995) conducted a study with first year university students (n=203) from a Northeast American university. The participants were required to complete several quantitative scales relating to social support, adjustment, and psychosocial competency. The results indicated that socially supported students produced the most desirable outcomes in the areas of academic, social, and emotional adjustment. In addition, the findings suggested that lacking a supportive social network could severely hinder ones adjustment to university. These findings provide confirmation to the belief that social support aids students to successfully adjust to university.

More recently a study by Pratt, Bowers, Terzian, & Hunsberger (2000) examined the effectiveness of implementing a social support program for first year students into the university setting. The recruited participants (n=110), from a small Canadian university, were required to complete various questionnaires, pre and post intervention. The participants were divided into two groups, a control group (n=50) and an experimental group (n=60). The experimental group was further divided into six groups and each group engaged in nine group discussion sessions over the course of first semester. The control group was not required to take part in the intervention and simply had to fill out the questionnaires at the same time intervals as the participants from the experimental group.

These results provide significant support for social support in aiding university adjustment as students involved in the experimental group scored higher on tests of university adjustment than those students in the control group. Furthermore, it was revealed that students involved in the intervention were less likely to report depressive symptoms, and were less inclined to skip class when compared with students in the control group (Pratt et al., 2000).

These findings are consistent with findings from other research (e.g., Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Lamothe et al., 1995) which suggests that social support is a major mechanism in the successful adjustment of first year students to university.

Another element that plays a prominent role in university adjustment and is partially related to social support is expectations. Student expectations about university prior to entering the educational institution are reported to impact on their ability to adjust to university as such expectations influence ones feelings and perceptions about university and subsequently influence ones response to such expectations. Students who have expectations that are positive and representative of reality tend to experience sound adjustment to university as compared to students with particularly negative expectations or who experience discrepancies between expectations and reality (Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000).

Research by Jackson et al. (2000) attempted to provide insight into the relationship between student expectations and university adjustment. The study took place at a Canadian university and included 107 first year university students. The participants completed eight questionnaires on five separate occasions over the course of their four years of study at the university. The results revealed that student expectations about university played a critical role in their adjustment to university. Students who possessed positive academic and adaptation expectations tended to adjust most successfully to university. Conversely, students with fearful expectations were more inclined to adjust poorly to university. Explanations for these findings originate from the belief that students with positive expectations were more inclined to anticipate challenges they may encounter when making the transition to university and hence were well equipped when experiencing the reality of university. Similar findings have been generated by earlier research (e.g., Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992) which provides further validation for the importance of student expectations in university adjustment.

Justification for much emphasis being placed on the importance of successful university adjustment stems from the crucial role this process plays in the academic persistence of

students. In an attempt to ascertain which of the three areas of adjustment is the best at predicting academic persistence, Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) studied a group of first year university students. A total of 208 participants were recruited from a large Northwest American university, and were asked to complete two self-report questionnaires regarding university adjustment. Six years following the completion of the questionnaires, each student's transcript was examined and their graduation status determined. The results from the study indicated that personal/emotional, social, and academic adjustment were all equally important in predicting academic persistence in students. These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1992; Schwitzer et al., 1999) which suggests the completion of a university degree is a complex achievement whereby no single predictor is successful in determining academic persistence.

The crucial role of social support in successful university adjustment and academic persistence has been well established however the manner in which social support contributes to these positive outcomes has yet to be explored. Two competing theories exist in the research literature, the buffering model and the main/direct effect model, both of which attempt to explain how social support operates. The buffering model argues that a positive relationship exists between support and well-being. Where an individual is under stress the support they receive from friends and family serves as a buffer from the potentially negative effects of the stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The main direct/effect model suggests social support is beneficial regardless of whether the individual is experiencing stress or not. This model postulates that individuals in socially supportive networks have regular positive experiences and are provided with stability, predictability, as well as a sense of self worth. These positive outcomes of social interaction then impact on the person's overall well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

In an attempt to determine which of the two models was more plausible, Cohen and Wills (1985) reviewed a large number of studies and concluded evidence exists to support both models. This suggests neither model is superior

in explaining the process of social support and Cohen and Wills argue that the manner in which the two models conceptualized social support is reflected by the two different processes through which social support impacted on well-being.

The positive outcomes of social support in the transition and adjustment to university have been well documented. It is important to note however that students experience additional benefits when they experience social support. Social support has been positively correlated with mental and physical health, positive coping, and optimism (Jou & Fukada, 2002; Zea et al., 1995; Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002). For example, Halamandaris and Power (1997) focused their research on social support and the psychosocial adjustment of first year university students. Participants in this study included 129 British students, all of who were required to fill out several quantitative questionnaires on personality, social support, and psychosocial adjustment to university. The results indicated that students who lacked social support tended to be lonely, introverted, anxious, and scored lower on tests of mental and somatic well-being when compared with students who were socially supported. These findings were replicated in more recent studies by Jou and Fukada (2000) as well as Furukawa, Sarason, and Sarason (1998) which suggests social support is correlated with positive mental and physical health outcomes.

Social support also encourages students to adopt positive coping strategies. Positive coping strategies are characterized by problem-focused efforts and an approach-oriented style which are seen as positive predictors of university adjustment and result in fewer emotional and behavioural disorders (Tao et al., 2000). For example, research by Tao et al. (2000) demonstrated that social support was positively related to student's adopting positive coping strategies. This was revealed when 390 Chinese university students completed several quantitative scales relating to social support, coping strategies, and university adjustment. The results indicated that students who reported high levels of social support were more inclined to engage in positive coping as opposed to negative coping. Further research by Shields (2001) generated similar findings when it was revealed that students who persisted with their academic

studies were more inclined to use positive coping strategies and actively seek out social support as compared to students who lacked such support.

Closely related to the issue of positive coping is optimism. Individuals with an optimistic outlook are more effective at coping with stressful events than pessimistic individuals. Optimists tend to possess high levels of social support suggesting that social support may encourage people to become more optimistic (Brissette et al., 2002). In a study by Brissette et al. (2002) the relationship between social support and optimism was explored. The study focused on students going through the transition from high school to university and included 89 American students. The participants were asked to complete seven scales that focused on various issues such as social support, stress, and optimism. The results from the study revealed that students with an optimistic outlook experienced more social support than students categorized as pessimists. Furthermore, optimistic students were less stressed, scored lower on tests of depression, and engaged in positive coping. This suggests that social support is positively related to optimism, mental health, and positive coping.

Despite the amount of research that has been generated by the issues of social support, university adjustment, and academic persistence few studies have used a qualitative approach which enables a more detailed understanding of the issues surrounding social support from the perspective of the students' themselves. Further to this changes to higher education in the Australian tertiary sector has lead to a doubling of the amount of people seeking tertiary entrance (50% of first years are less than 19 years of age) and has put a strain on universities systems as many students are under prepared for the tertiary education experience (NICHE, 1997). As a result attrition rates have increased and are highest in the first year of university attendance (Chang, Cohen, Pike, Pooley, & Breen, 2003). With these contextual factors in mind the present study attempts to examine the importance of social support to the transitional experience of first year Australian university students.

Methodology

Sample

All participants were first year university students at an Australian university. As suggested by Moutsakas (1990) a total of 12 participants were recruited to participate in the present study. The participants (10 females and two males) were either full-time or part-time students ranging in age from 17 to 45 years.

Once involved in the study participants took part in an interview where they were asked to describe their experience of starting university and what adjustments they have had to make in terms of the academic environment and the social environment. They were also asked about the expectations of the course of study they had chosen and any positive and negative aspects, emotions or experiences they had had.

Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded and transcribed and then analyzed using the constant comparative method as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The constant comparative method involves a combination of inductive category coding with a comparison of all the obtained units of meaning. When new units of meaning are discovered, they are compared with all the other units of meaning and then categorized with the similar units of meaning. A new category is formed if there are no similar units of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

The process of analysis began with inductive category coding. This involved examining all the transcripts for recurring concepts and themes. Each concept or theme formed a provisional category. Any data that then fitted in a provisional category was placed in the respective category. If data did not fit any of the provisional categories, a new category was formed and named. This process continued until all identified concepts and themes were placed in a category (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

The next step in the analysis involved examination. Each provisional category was examined and propositional statements were then made for each of the categories. A propositional statement indicates the meaning that is contained in the data gathered, together,

Table 1
Themes Relating to Transition and University Adjustment

Theme	Label
Theme 1	**Social Support**
Sub Theme A	Academic adjustment
Sub Theme B	Social adjustment
	• Developing friendships
	• Peer mentors
	• Sources of support
	• Elements of supportive friendships
	• University friendships
	• Mature age students and socializing
Sub Theme C	Academic persistence
Sub Theme D	Optimism and positive coping
Theme 2	**Expectations**
Sub Theme A	Realistic expectations
Sub Theme B	School leaver students and social expectations
Theme 3	**Transitional Issues**
Sub Theme A	Change daily routine
Sub Theme B	Financial adjustment
Sub Theme C	New learning environment
Sub Theme D	Adjusting to academic workload
Theme 4	**Time Management**
Theme 5	**Emotions**
Sub Theme A	School leaver student emotions
Sub Theme B	Mature age student emotions

under a category name. The data contained in each category was then reread to ensure it fitted its designated category. If the data did not fit the given category, they were categorized elsewhere (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

The subsequent step in the data analysis involved careful examination of the propositional statements. The goal here was to identify the propositions that stand alone and those which are connected. The combination of two or more propositions is referred to as an outcome proposition. This process continued with similar categories combining to result in fewer and more meaningful categories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). At the completion of this process a peer reviewed the final categories to check for meaning. There was general agreeance on the labeled categories and the data contained under each category. This process of member checking is particularly important as it ensures the credibility and dependability of the obtained data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Findings and Interpretations

From the analysis five themes emerged, as follows, social support, expectations, transitional issues, time management, and emotions. To enhance ones understanding of the themes extracted from the research, a table is presented below that details the themes and sub themes produced by the data analysis.

Each theme was an important contributor in enabling participants to adjust successfully to university. Prior to presenting each theme it is necessary to acknowledge a crucial finding that emerged from this research. It was revealed that the participants could be divided into two distinct groups, school leaver students and mature age students. School leaver students are students who enter university straight from high school whereas mature age students are students who are

over the age of 20 the year they plan to study an undergraduate qualification at university. The themes presented in this research are pertinent to both groups of students however it will become evident that although all participants had similar experiences as first year university students, the nature of some of these experiences differed depending on the classification of the student.

Social Support

    Academic Adjustment

      The most prominent theme to evolve from the data is that of social support. Social support was consistently reported by the participants as being a critical factor in their successful adjustment to university, specifically in the areas of academic and social adjustment. An example of how social support aided academic adjustment was reported by one participant as follows:

> *My sister's been here for two years so she gave me a lot of advice and stuff. She got me started. She explained how the library works, how to find journal articles, and stuff. She also looked over my assignments when I asked her to so I could make sure I was on the right track.*

      Peer support also arose as being an important factor in academic adjustment. For example:

> *A girlfriend of mine, her and I would get together – not so much in 'Intro to Psych.' but more in 'Research Methods'. There were actually a few of us that would get together in 'Research Methods'. That was really, really helpful… After 20 years stats. can be pretty daunting.*

      In addition to family support and peer support, faculty support also emerged as a salient factor in aiding academic adjustment. For example:

> *I really feel they (the lecturers) outline everything so well, and in the tutorials the tutors help out a lot with what's expected of us. In 'Introduction To Psychology' our tutor went through exactly how to write an essay so I didn't feel too bad about it.*

      Furthermore, it appears that academic support services provided by the university are a practical and useful mechanism for enhancing academic adjustment, particularly for mature age students. As one mature age participant noted:

> *I did a uni prep. course… It was basically just like you learnt how to write essays, do research, and do all the kinds of things you need to do for an assignment. They taught you what plagiarism was and how to reference and all things like that… It definitely helped me prepare for the academic side of uni.*

    Social Adjustment

    Social support also played a critical role in participants' ability to adjust to the social environment within the university setting. As one mature age participant mentioned:

> *There's two ladies who I've made friends with who are in a similar situation to myself, they're mature age and have families, and we have a good chat when we can. It's really good knowing other people who are in a similar situation to yourself because you're usually experiencing the same feelings and problems so we can talk to each other about this stuff.*

      To reinforce the notion that social support is an important factor in social adjustment and hence overall adjustment to university, one mature age participant recalls why she withdrew from university 12 years earlier:

> *I didn't fit in. I didn't find the experience as welcoming as I thought it would be…I found everyone was really clicky… I just found the whole social side of things unwelcoming and I didn't really integrate too well.*

      An important finding to emerge from the data is the difficulty many participants, particularly school leaver participants, reported having in developing friendships due to the fact they did not have regular contact with the same people. As two school leaver participants noted:

> *It's a bit harder (to make friends) than school because I'm used to seeing everyone, everyday, where here it's like once a week."*
>
> *"It did take a little bit longer to make friends, mainly because we're not at uni all day, every day like high school.*

One mechanism adopted by the university that did help participants develop friendships within the university environment was peer mentors. All participants in this study were assigned to small groups and each group included a mentor, usually a second or third year psychology student, who was available to answer any questions students may have had about university. As two participants explained:

The mentor…She was very nice. She explained university and showed us around which made it a bit easier because I didn't know where everything was, like the library and all that, so that was quite a useful thing to have."

"There was a tute where we had a mentor, I met some people and everything and there's a couple of people from that who I made friends with and we (text) message each other all the time.

An interesting finding that was revealed in the analysis was the existence of two peer support groups. Participants consistently reported that they had two distinct sources of peer support, their university friends and their friends outside of university. Friends within the university setting were useful for dealing with issues regarding university and friends outside of university were helpful for dealing with other life issues. For example:

If the situation arose where I felt stressed out I would probably call up one of my friends from high school and go out for coffee or chat, and if it was to do with uni I'd probably ask one of my uni mates about it.

This finding raises an important issue and this concerns the key elements of a socially supportive relationship. It appears that similarity and understanding are important attributes in supportive friendships. As one participant said:

We're there to help each other because we're all in the same boat, we're going through similar experiences so it's comforting being able to go through these experiences with someone who understands.

In addition to the previous finding, it was revealed that university friendships only exist within the educational institution and do not extend into the students personal lives. As one participant mentioned:

I've already got my own friends who I go out and socialize with…I've made friends with people at uni but that's mainly just to do with uni, like assignments and stuff, not socially going out with them.

An explanation for this may be due to the 'newness' of the university friendships as they are only in their early stages of development, however one may find that as the students progress through university these friendships will strengthen and as a result the relationship may be viewed differently.

In regards to social support and social adjustment, an additional noteworthy finding did emerge from the data. It was revealed that the mature age participants were overtly conscious not to create large social networks for themselves within the university environment. This finding is clearly indicated by one mature age participant:

I've found that because I haven't studied for six years and it was my decision to go back to uni, I chose not to try make too many friends because I'm there to study not socialize. Even though I have peers that I can talk to and get advice from…I chose not to make too much of a social environment so I'm not wasting my time socializing.

The reported findings indicate that social support is an important contributor to successful social adjustment and it appears that the combination of these two factors provides the student with comfort and reassurance within the university setting. For example, two participants mentioned:

It's good knowing you have that support if you need it, it's reassuring. It's also good to walk into the lecture theatre or tutorial and know some familiar faces, it makes the whole uni experience more enjoyable.

Knowing that there is someone around who will listen to you if you needed it is good to know. And it's nice to walk into a lecture theatre and know some familiar faces, it makes you feel more at ease.

The findings generated from this study exhibit remarkable similarity to findings from earlier research on social support and university adjustment. Research by Hinderlie and Kenny (2002), Pratt et al. (2000), and Zea et al. (1995) suggests social support is a salient factor in university adjustment as students who experienced support scored more highly on scales relating to university adjustment when compared with students lacking such support. The findings from this present study affirm the importance of social support in the transition to university.

Academic Persistence

In addition to playing a vital role in aiding adjustment to university, social support also contributed to students' decisions to persist with their academic studies. As noted by one participant:

> *My brother's girlfriend. She's basically my strength I spose, without her I think I would have just given up cos I just feel that things I needed to know about doing assignments, and general stuff about uni and preparing for it, if I didn't have someone close to me helping me…I would've just said it's too hard and forgotten about it before I'd even given it a chance.*

This quote reinforces the importance of social support during the transition to university and also highlights how a lack of support could hinder adjustment and subsequently impact on a student's decision to persist with their academic studies. Past research in this area (e.g., Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1992) suggests social support is an important mechanism in encouraging academic persistence in tertiary students. These current findings provide favourable support for this notion.

Optimism and Positive Coping

Further to aiding university adjustment and encouraging academic persistence, social support was also revealed to foster optimism and positive coping in students. Participants who were well supported were more inclined to have optimistic outlooks and engage in positive coping. For example:

> *Sometimes when I start an assignment there might be a bit of self doubt but I just know if I do it, it will be O.K. I try not to think too many negative thoughts, like self doubt, I'm not like that. I'm much more of a positive person. I'm the kind of person that faces things head on, so if I'm feeling overwhelmed or stressed out I just deal with the situation then and there.*

These findings are congruent with findings from other research (e.g., Brissette et al., 2002; Shields, 2001; Tao et al., 2000) which have been successful in demonstrating that socially supported students have a tendency to be optimistic and engage in positive coping. These present findings provide further support to the belief that optimism and positive coping are positively linked with social support.

Expectations

Realistic Expectations

The second theme to emerge through the data was expectations. Most participants held relatively realistic expectations about university, this was made possible as many participants had family or friends who were completing, or who had completed, tertiary studies and such contacts provided the participant with information and advice on university. As two participants reported:

> *Well I've got heaps of mates who went to uni so I've had plenty of feedback from them about what to expect. My parents always said that uni was extremely hard and so I did think it would be pretty full on, which it was in a way with all the readings and research. It was O.K. though because I was prepared for it.*

Such realistic expectations may have also contributed to the successful adjustment of the participants to university. The research literature supports this notion by suggesting students who possess positive academic and adaptation expectancies in relation to university adjust well when making the transition to the educational institution. Students with such expectations are believed to anticipate potential challenges and acknowledge the importance of their role in the adjustment process, the combination of these positive elements enable students to make a sound adjustment to university (Jackson et al., 2000).

School Leaver Students and Social Expectations

An intriguing finding to emerge from the data regarding expectations relates to a common expectation held by students classified as school leavers. Participants who were school leaver students consistently reported feeling disappointed about the fact the university lacked a vibrant social atmosphere. Such participants expected the university to offer more opportunities for socialization amongst the students. As one student expressed:

I think that would be really good (to have social gatherings) because that makes you want to meet new people. That was another expectation I had about uni, I thought there would be like a faculty ball or parties where students can get together…an informal gathering outside of the uni environment would be really good and well received by first year students. I was expecting to have more of a social life from my uni friends but I haven't really seen them out of uni, so it's been different to what I expected.

This finding is inconsistent with the research that has been conducted on expectations and adjustment (e.g., Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Jackson et al., 2000) as such research asserts that when discrepancies arise in relation to one's expectations and reality, the individual is more inclined to experience difficulties in adjusting to their new environment. Despite such inconsistencies there is a plausible explanation for this finding. It is possible that the peer mentor program, which involved all participants, provided the students with a substitute means of social contact which meant the incompatibility of their expectations with reality actually had little impact on their ability to adjust to university.

Transitional Issues

Change Daily Routine

The third theme that arose through the data was transitional issues. Participants regularly reported encountering a number of challenges when making the transition to university. Some of these challenges were relevant to both school leaving participants and mature age participants, whereas some challenges were only applicable to one of the groups. A transitional issue that required adjustment for both groups of participants was changing ones daily routine. The following two quotes, the former by a school leaver participant and the latter by a mature age participant, highlight this issue:

It was a little hard to get into the routine because it is so different from school…I felt weird cos you don't have to get up at 7 o'clock each morning to go to school and then come home at 3, and it's a little bit more interruptive. The hardest thing is probably after 6pm, that's when most people who are working start to switch off, but you have to keep going.

Financial Adjustment

Another transitional issue that was reported by the mature age participants as an area that required some adjustment was the lack of money. The majority of the mature age participants worked as full-time employees prior to commencing university and evidently had to adjust to a lower income. One mature age participant clearly highlights this point:

That was very difficult (going from full-time employment to full-time study), I found that because I had been working for six years full-time I found that I always had money back then and to suddenly go to minimal wages is very hard.

New Learning Environment

A transitional issue that arose as being very prominent for school leaver participants was having to adjust to a new learning environment. Specifically, these participants reported difficulty in adjusting to being responsible for their own education. As two school leaver participants mentioned:

The extreme of going from year 12 to uni, the difference is a lot. You have to motivate yourself and figure things out for yourself. There's no actual time set, like no-one saying you should be studying for this or you should be doing that, there's just no set timetable and I think that's what takes the most adjusting.

Adjusting to Academic Workload

A final transitional issue that emerged as being challenging for both school leaver and mature age participants was the size of the workload the course required. All participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the volume of work. For example:

I just found the workload was quite overwhelming…there is so much to deal with, like loads of things to read, and the books are huge.

The thing that blew me away was the research. The whole research attached to psychology is something completely new to me, so when you're doing all the assignments you need to find all these things. It's so involved.

These findings relating to transitional issues present an area that has remained relatively untouched in the research that focuses on social support and university adjustment. It does however demonstrate that students must make adjustments in all facets of their lives when making the transition to university and suggests how a failure to make such adjustments may potentially hinder the successful adjustment of the student to university. Further to this, these findings present an interesting point and this relates to the manner in which different types of students experience different challenges when entering tertiary studies. Clearly there are obstacles encountered by all entering students, however there are also challenges that are unique and applicable to only specific genres of students.

Time Management

Time management presents the fourth theme that was revealed in the data. The participants consistently reported experiencing difficulty in trying to allocate sufficient time to all the demands in their lives. As three participants reported:

Time management was a big concern… just trying to keep the house clean, go to uni, do the readings, go to work, making sure I was spending enough time with my daughter…Just trying to fit all that in took a bit of adjusting.

Time management I'm not very good at…I'm trying to juggle work,

boyfriend, family, friends, and study, and so I end up doing a lot of my assignments at the last minute…I'm not too good at time management.

I've always been a part-time student because I've always had to work full-time. It's difficult to balance the two, that's probably been the hardest thing…I'm just finding it difficult to find the time to study and get on campus to do the research I need to for assignments.

Although this issue of time management affected all entering students, it was particularly prominent for the mature age participants. This is neither a surprising nor unique finding as mature age students typically experience severe time constraints as they must contend with responsibilities (e.g., child rearing) that are not commonly encountered by other students. Despite having so many additional pressures and demands, the mature age participants believe such added responsibilities provide them with skills that are advantageous to them. For example:

I find being a mature age student…I know how to deal with stress and balance several things like uni work, part-time work, child and that. So I think in that sense a mature age student would have some advantages.

These present findings are congruent with earlier research that has focused on the experiences of first year university students (e.g., McKenzie & Gow, 2004; Wong & Kwok, 1997) which has found mature age students experience extreme time constraints due to the multiple responsibilities and commitments in their lives. Due to such time pressures the mature age student must learn to manage their time effectively.

This issue of time management is a relatively new phenomenon that is affecting university students and this may be the result of the changing dynamics of university students. Present day living means many students balance full-time studies with part-time/casual employment which places immense restrictions on the student's time and consequently time management becomes a necessary skill to master. Perhaps as research progresses in this area

similar findings will be generated which may encourage universities to actively address this issue by providing students with information on how to effectively manage their time.

Emotions

School Leaver Student Emotions

The final theme to emerge from the data is that of emotions. Participants reported experiencing two types of emotions in the lead up to commencing university, these emotions were labeled positive and negative emotions. A positive emotion that participants consistently reported experiencing was excitement. The most common negative emotion experienced by participants was nervousness. Justification for such feelings differed depending on whether the participant was a school leaver or mature age student. School leaver participants suggested their excitement was the result of starting a new chapter in their lives. The nervousness appeared to stem from the fact they knew no-one and concern about how they would integrate into the social environment. For example:

Beforehand it was really exciting, I was really excited, couldn't wait to start.
I guess it (university) signified a new start, new beginnings.
I was pretty nervous because I didn't know anyone at all...and I was wondering how I was going to fit in.

Mature Age Student Emotions

The mature age participants claim their excitement was due to the prospect of learning again. The nervousness that the mature age participants commonly reported feeling was the result of doubts they had surrounding their own academic ability. For example:

Beforehand I was a bit nervous but excited as well...I was nervous thinking 'Oh gosh, I hope I'm gonna be able to handle the work and stuff' but excited as well cos I was kinda getting bored not learning anything.
Not knowing what I was capable of made me pretty nervous. I think I had put it off for so long for the fear of not being able to do it. Like I wasn't sure if I would be able to handle the workload, write essays, and stuff like that.

This theme of emotions is certainly a noteworthy issue as how one feels emotionally about entering a new and unfamiliar environment would evidently impact on their ability to adjust to the new environment. Hence the participants' emotions would have made an important contribution to their overall adjustment to university. It is necessary to note however that limited research has been conducted looking at the role of emotions in university adjustment and hence the reported findings lack support from the literature. Therefore the findings reported in this paper present a potential avenue for future research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the importance of social support to the transitional experience of Australian students entering their first year of university. The nature of this transitional period and the subsequent adjustment of the students' to university was found to centre around five major themes and they included social support, expectations, transitional issues, time management, and emotions.

Social support emerged as the most prominent contributing factor in aiding students' adjustment to university. Specifically it was revealed that students made a sound adjustment to the social and academic domains of university when they experienced support. In addition to aiding adjustment, social support also emerged as a salient factor in encouraging academic persistence in the students. These findings are consistent with findings from earlier research (e.g., Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Pratt et al., 2000) suggesting social support is a major mechanism in aiding the adjustment of students to university.

The four remaining themes were also found to be important contributors in the successful adjustment of students' to university. For example, the realistic expectations held by the majority of the participants, in regards to university, was believed to have a positive influence on their ability to adjust to their new environment. Furthermore, several issues related to transitioning emerged as being particularly challenging for the participants and consequently took some adjusting. For example, adjusting to the academic workload and changing one's daily

routine were areas that required some attention on the participants behalf. It was vital that the participants overcame such obstacles so as to ensure they were in an optimal position for adjusting successfully to university.

Although this study produced a number of encouraging findings, it is important to note that there was a disproportionate number of male and female participants. The recruited participants in this study consisted of mainly female students and it is possible that female students have a different transitional experience to that of the male student. Therefore one must be cautious not to assume the transition to university is identical for both males and females. Despite this the results do present some practical recommendations for enhancing the adjustment of first year students to university. It is suggested that the tertiary institutions themselves could become actively involved in the transition of first year students to university by implementing programs that aid this process. For example, a peer mentor or buddy program is an effective initiative for developing social contacts amongst the entering students and provides an informal forum in which students can obtain information on all aspects of university.

An additional recommendation centres on the implementation of university preparation classes. Such classes should be made available to all entering students and could take place over the course of one or two days prior to the commencement of first semester. Topics worth covering include an introduction to academic writing and research, what students can expect from the university, their lecturers, and tutors, as well as the expectations of the university from the student. Other areas that should be acknowledged include time management techniques, stress reduction techniques, and the importance of self care. This would be a worthwhile and rewarding initiative for students as it would enlighten them on what to expect from university, expose them to the academic nature of university, and also provide them with valuable practical skills. The combination of these elements would ensure the students are well prepared for advancing beyond the challenges commonly encountered in the first year of university.

A final recommendation concerns social activities. Each faculty within a university should consider incorporating social gatherings into the semester calendar as this would encourage students to interact with one another and thus develop friendships. This study has effectively demonstrated the importance of friendships/relationships in aiding university adjustment and encouraging academic persistence, and therefore this proposed recommendation would be a useful initiative for enhancing this process.

In conclusion this study has highlighted the importance of social support during the transition of first year students to university. Social support not only enhanced students' ability to adjust to their new environment but also increased the likelihood of such students persisting with their academic studies. A potential direction for future research includes investigating how males and females, as well as mature age students and school leaver students, differ in their transitional experiences and adjustment to university. Furthermore, one may be inclined to focus on the under-researched themes that emerged in this study as being important contributors to the adjustment process. This additional research would be most valuable in enhancing our understanding of social support, transition, and university adjustment.

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email: j.pooley@ecu.edu.au

Address correspondence to
Julie Ann Pooley
School of Psychology
Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Dve
Joondalup, Perth
Western Australia, 6027
Ph: 618 6304 5591
Fax: 618 6304 5834

"Is this going to be on the test?!":
Seeking Authentic Engagement in a Large Undergraduate Course

Jacob Z. Hess
Sadie Larsen
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

In spite of growing research attention to structural innovations for large university courses, the actual practice of supervising such a course remains extremely challenging. Against a backdrop of similar efforts, this paper reports our own attempt over two years to develop a large-course structure cultivating greater freedom and authentic exploration for students. While more empowering teaching obviously entails meaningful shifts in practice itself, we also found ourselves interrogating fundamental assumption about teaching and learning to a surprising degree. Consequently, we begin by reviewing competing interpretive frameworks or "problem definitions" that we propose as partially constituting distinct educational practices. We then turn to an evaluation of our own practical efforts at promoting greater democracy and dialogue within a large course. These efforts ranged from particular note-taking formats, to unique attendance and evaluation policies, to whole class poster sessions. By inviting more collective interrogation of the basic interpretive framework and practice of large class supervision, we hope to encourage other university teachers to further consider more empowering and transformative course formats.

In spite of long-standing research attention to innovative possibilities in large university classes (Weimer, 1987), the experience of actually supervising such a course typically remains extremely difficult. From limited interaction to the sheer grading burden, a mass undergraduate class presents particular challenge to even the best of teachers. Hu and Kuh (2002) cite their own analyses a decade earlier indicating that a substantial fraction of 50,000 students at 128 American colleges were "not engaged at meaningful levels in educationally purposeful activities," with a solid 18% qualifying as "disengaged" (p. 556). Similar concerns have been raised in other countries (e.g., Blunden, 2002; Francis & Byrne, 1999).

Over recent decades, a growing "scholarship of teaching" movement has begun to shed light on innovations that may address such challenges in large courses (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Kreber, 2001). In spite of these efforts, many instructors, unfortunately remain unaware of alternatives to the factory or "banking" (Freire, 1993) model as a viable approach to large courses. This emphasis on teachers efficiently transmitting information in mass lectures is often assumed to be the inevitable format for such a course. After

reviewing ways to cultivate greater student engagement, for instance, O'Sullivan (1997) notes that such innovations

> [call for] course sections involv[ing] no more than 15 students. Greater numbers of students limit class interaction. . . . On the other hand, the class size can be much larger if the pedagogy primarily consists of lectures, papers, and student class presentations/projects (p. 9).

The purpose of this manuscript is to explore and illustrate the surprising possibilities of large university courses. Scholars in community psychology have had a natural interest over the years in finding ways of structuring the class "community" in empowering ways (Dalton, 2007; Moos 1979; Sarason, 1997). While the majority of this article analyzes teaching innovations within our own community psychology course, we have also aimed for the presentation to be more broadly helpful by referencing throughout the paper exemplary large-course research from diverse fields. Specific to community psychology, we offer it as an extension and continuation of previous thoughtful explorations on undergraduate teaching in the discipline (e.g., McLean, Johnson, & Eblen, 1977; O'Sullivan,

1997; Rossi, 1975). In discussing the limited exposure of students to community psychology, Ferrari and O'Donnell (1997) proposed that "the development of additional undergraduate courses in community psychology is one of the most important topics in the field" (p. 1), a sentiment we share.

While centering on our own empirical explorations of teaching innovations, we wish to avoid portraying meaningful teaching change as primarily a matter of technique or method. When students are categorically assumed to be passive and unmotivated, even the most creative teaching technique becomes yet another manipulation tactic. For this reason, we preface our practice evaluation with a classic community psychology exercise: exploring competing "problem definitions" of large courses—in particular, explanations of the problem of student passivity (Seidman & Rappaport, 1986). (For purposes of this paper, "apathy," "passivity" and "disengagement" are used interchangeably, in reference to limited or insincere student participation in a large course). At its heart, the systematic analysis of problem definition reflects the larger philosophical turn towards serious examination of interpretation and language within academia (Hess, 2005), with more rigorous research attention being paid generally to the way *distinct ways of thinking* can partially "constitute" *particular ways of being* (Taylor, 1985). At the paper's conclusion, we explore several larger meta-questions relevant to the theory and practice of quality university teaching. Overall, by juxtaposing analyses of varied teaching practice and distinct interpretive frameworks, we hope to make salient the abundant possibilities found in any course, on any subject, and of any size.

Problem definition analysis: "How do we make sense of student apathy?"

While the brute, objective challenge of student passivity or disengagement is evident, as with any social problem, there are multiple ways of framing and explaining it. In this case, we propose two "modal explanations" evident across scholarly and popular discourse. While actual practice reflects these portrayals in varying hybrids and intensities, we propose the formal distinctions as a helpful backdrop for further investigation of the problem and its appropriate

solutions.

First portrayal: Students as primary explanations for their own passivity

One prevailing way of making sense of disengagement attends to students themselves as primarily responsible for the problem. While acknowledging institutional context, passivity is largely explained based on the nature of individual students—specifically, their general lack of motivation to learn.

Course structure.

Given this view, instrumental structure and reinforcement is naturally seen as critical for teaching success. These mechanisms vary in intensity, from random quizzes to required attendance. The structure also typically extends to the learning process itself, with clear indications to students of what is important to know, when they should know it, and how they should demonstrate their knowledge. Particularly in large courses, this level of structure and control is assumed to be critical in effectively managing students and ensuring their participation.

Class roles

Within such an approach, the role of a teacher is focused primarily on managing the structure to ensure participation and learning, i.e., recording attendance, delivering information through lectures, laying out assignments with explicit deadlines and administering examinations. Evidence of passivity may be taken as indicating a need for additional structural reinforcements. In turn, the role of a student becomes following the teacher's instructions in receiving class material and ultimately demonstrating this knowledge in a particular time and way.

In contexts requiring the efficient transmission of information, this kind of approach may be very beneficial. In other settings, however, doubts have been raised as to the nature of the ensuing learning engagement. Duckett (2002), for instance, argues that within highly structured courses, typically "students occupy a disempowered position . . . reflected in the passivity of their prescribed role in a learning environment dominated by didactic teaching and rote learning" (p. 98; see also Raffini, 1993). In light of such concerns, we turn towards an examination of alternative structural

arrangements by first considering a wholly different way of understanding student disengagement.

Second portrayal: Context as primary explanation for student passivity

A second explanation for student disengagement attends more centrally to relationships between students and their surrounding contexts. While acknowledging students' responsibility for their own education, individuals themselves are not taken to be primary explanations for passivity. Instead, long years of socialization in educational systems are seen as impacting students' own intrinsic motivation. Since students are here understood to be active participants in their contexts, this view is not to be confused with a third portrayal that blames systems entirely, which would be as problematic as the one largely blaming students.

Course structure

From this view instrumental reinforcements are seen as potentially harmful to student motivation. Structural revisions may range from eliminating attendance manipulation to altering the nature of final examinations. This "loosening" may extend to the learning itself, with expectations of what, when and how to learn becoming more malleable and a different structure set up which encourages exploration in more flexible and personalized ways.

Class roles

Within such an approach, teachers are no longer expected to *ensure* learning by directly eliciting participation and "getting students involved." Instead, teachers indirectly *facilitate* student engagement by altering conditions in a way that provides greater opportunities for students to exercise their own motivation. In this way, like ethical research participation, genuine student involvement is "invited" and maintained free of pressure and force. While tests, assignments, lectures and attendance are still important, they may function here in very different ways. Students, who are seen as ultimately possessing inherent motivation to learn, share the responsibility for education with the teacher and thus have a role that extends beyond simple receipt of knowledge.

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) argues for the transformative power of any event where participants come together with a genuine intent of "putting themselves into play." When both teacher and student authentically contribute to the exchange, a "fusion of horizons" may occur where understanding on all sides becomes different.

While this kind of a "dialogic" educational model has increasingly been taken up within small classes, its potential has typically been presumed to be necessarily linked to class size. Large courses have thus been assumed to require more instrumental structural reinforcements, as described above. The impetus for our own exploration was questioning whether a fundamentally different model of education was indeed necessary simply because of larger class size. More positively, we were inspired by the possibilities of setting up larger courses with more authentic space and freedom.

What follows is a review of key practical lessons learned during our two year attempt towards dialogic ideals in a 200-level, semester-long elective class. Our students evenly spanned from freshman to senior years, with a majority female (76% over the final year). Over the course of four semesters we tested multiple structural innovations addressing the challenge of student disengagement. Each semester began with what we understood as the best structure possible for nurturing genuine participation and ended with gathering feedback towards further shifts for the next semester. As our teaching practices evolved, we documented emerging lessons and monitored the effects of new structural changes. During the final semester, we obtained IRB approval to use student feedback as research data. Our outcome assessment draws on comments from midterm and final evaluations from that last semester, as well as correspondence with students who dropped the course.

Practice evaluation: "How can we partner with students in authentic learning?"

In making the attempt, we experimented with multiple aspects of the classroom environment, from note-taking, assignments, and reading to presentations, attendance and grades. Since a language of "methods, techniques and tools" can imply objects which are static and passive, we prefer to speak of varying aspects of an approach or "way of being" as a teacher. Below, we present our 10 main efforts, organized

across three broad, interrelated areas: (A) facilitating students' personal ownership, critical exploration, and active engagement; (B) fostering authentic connection and exchange within the classroom community; and (C) maintaining effective accountability while avoiding manipulation.

For each aspect, we illustrate our own efforts alongside similar initiatives, with outcome evidence reviewed for both. We conclude this practice section with feedback on the overall course atmosphere, drawing on both standard university evaluations and our own survey of students, including many students who had dropped the course. This feedback was reviewed for salient themes, with selected quotes illustrative of these themes. Reported percentages come from both university evaluations and a count of several free-response questions in our own survey.

A. Facilitating personal ownership, critical exploration and active engagement

This thrust of our initiative comprises structural efforts to reinforce exploration based on students' own passions and perspectives.

(1) "Your community issue": Centering class structure around student interests. One of our most successful course aspects was an attempt to bring course material "to life" in a way that mattered to students. Early in the semester, we invited students to select a community issue of personal importance around which to center their semester's learning. Issues ranged from homelessness, racism and domestic violence to eating disorders, sex education and college drinking. Writing assignments, thought papers and exam questions subsequently referred to and revolved around their particular issue (e.g., "What does primary prevention look like for your issue?")

Other instructors have reported similar efforts to allow student choice of what to study and how to study it (Burkill, 1997; Gonzales & Semken, 2006) and create more "person-centered" (Barkham & Elender, 1995) or "learning/student centered classrooms" (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Scott, Buchanan, & Haigh, 1997). Duckett (2002) calls on teachers to "redress the unequal distribution of power between [teachers] and students through carving open spaces for students to occupy empowering roles in the

educational process" (p. 96). "Democratic learning" (MacBeath & Moos, 2004) and "finding freedom in the classroom" (Hinchey, 1998) are themes of broader educational efforts towards greater control and exploratory space for students.

Emphases on student interests and choice have been linked to decreased apathy and deeper learning engagement generally (DiClementi & Handelsman, 2005; Stanier, 1997; Teixeira-Dias et al, 2005). After reviewing positive implications of self-determination, Raffini (1993) cites a study by deCharms reporting that a "major characteristic of teachers who were able to motivate students towards academic achievement was their skill at carefully nurturing students' ability to make choices within the classroom" (p. 91).

The large majority of our own students (96%) also had positive things to say about the opportunity to center learning around a chosen issue. Students spoke of being able to "work on things they care about" and "focus on an interest by choice not by force." They commented that it added meaning to class material and "made the class more personal" and "a lot more class-member focused than just a professor talking at a class." Other students, however, spoke of difficulty in connecting concepts to the same issue and recommended more space for a variety of topics.

(2) Sketchpads, portfolios and final gallery display: Formally valuing students' own reflections. Even where course *content* reflects more freedom to connect with personal interests, the *process* of actual study in a large class may continue to reinforce largely unilateral, passive learning. An overarching structure of lectures, reading and note-taking may subtly reinforce in students a primary role in receiving and retaining knowledge. To the degree that students are accustomed to sit back and wait to learn, freedom to explore within the class may be less meaningful, if not bothersome. Given this, we sought ways to facilitate a learning *process* centered around student exploration as well.

Our primary intervention towards this end focused on note-taking. Rather than simply write what was said in class, students were encouraged to explore their own reflections in a thought journal or "sketchpad." Barkham and Elender

(1995) asked students to maintain similar "dossier" notebooks in their own large course structure. In both cases, like exploring artists, students were invited to sketch personal reflections, musings, concerns and questions throughout class discussion and readings. To encourage this exploration, we combated the notion of an introductory course as leading to comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the field. Instead, we encouraged students to have fun getting to know or "flirting with" many areas of the field, and referred to the course as a "first date" with community psychology. Our accountability structure supported this space as well, from open-ended response papers on a particular theme to examinations centered on "broad brush strokes" of the field. Overall, rather than telling students what was "important to focus on," we primarily encouraged their focus on what they found most exciting, critical or troubling. When questions arose in class we asked students to simultaneously suggest their own *best answer* to their inquiry. By reinforcing in concrete ways the value of their own reflections, we sought to counterbalance student habits of over-reliance on external determinants of how to think and to better reinforce "putting into play" their own energies and ideas. Ultimately, we found these approaches prompting many students to relate with us more as advisors or mentors, rather than simply instructors (see Jacobi, 1991).

With the success of student sketchpads, we leveraged the art metaphor further by naming their compilation of more polished course writing a "portfolio." While some used a basic word processing document, most took the option of creating their own web-log ("blog"). Since the opportunity to personally share in class was limited, writing was framed as the primary and most important way to "participate" during class. As the final artistic phase, the class poster session doubled as a final "gallery" presentation and allowed a broader sharing of student ideas (see details below).

(3) Interpretive teaching approach: Presenting material in a way that invites critical reflection. While a focus on students' engagement was paramount, we considered carefully how to present actual community psychology content as well. Although standard lecturing can clearly be beneficial at times (Benjamin, 1991), attention has been given to how lecturing may go beyond giving information to better cultivate critical thinking (e.g., Barkham & Elender, 1995; Brooks, 1984). Our primary inspiration for presenting material in an engaging way came from two past master teachers, Drs. Tom Schwandt (UIUC) and Brent Slife (BYU). Rather than telling students "the right way to think," each professor focuses energy on articulating a set of key issues in their fields, accompanied by distinct stances and ensuing implications of the same. In this way, students are allowed space to evaluate and decide for themselves what to think. In our case, we organized discussion around contested issues at the heart of community psychology: the relationship of values and science, the scope of analysis (individual vs. systems), the nature of analysis (strength vs. deficit thinking), the nature of interventions (prevention, empowerment, etc.), etc. On each issue, we outlined multiple ways of approaching the question and discussed respective consequences.

(4) Student problem definition analyses: Inviting personal practice with interpretive exploration. In addition to exploring multiple problem definitions in class discussion, we sought ways for students to "practice" the same exercise more concretely. Consequently, we challenged students to conduct a "problem definition analysis" of their own community issue. After reviewing popular discourse relevant to their issue (e.g., internet/newspapers/friends), students identified different "modal ways of thinking," each illustrated by verbatim text they had gathered. These problem definition analyses were ultimately presented next to "super-initiatives" for the same issues in the final class poster session (see below). Overall, this exercise turned out to be challenging for students, especially grasping the distinction between a more typical objective analysis of brute problems (*"problem analyses"*) and an analysis of the way problems are differentially interpreted and narrated across communities (*"problem definition analyses"*). In spite of this, we believe difficulties with the exercise largely reflected healthy growing pains in the positive practice of critically analyzing multiple positions on an issue.

(5) Hypothetical community "super-initiatives": Cultivating action orientation in spite of size. A final aspect of fostering personal exploration aimed to go beyond standard investigations towards an exploration of community action. From field placements (O'Sullivan 1997; Gonzales & Semken, 2006) to action research training (Keys, et al, 1999), active class components have been shown to be helpful. While large classes are often assumed to preclude such efforts, we experimented with an alternative way of nurturing a class "action-orientation."

After clustering students with common interests, small groups were charged to craft a community "super-initiative": an omnibus "dream intervention" created over the course of the semester that reflected all the potential solutions and best answers discovered for their chosen community problem. Specifically, as basic community psychology approaches were reviewed (prevention, empowerment and alternative settings), groups were challenged to brainstorm creative ways of applying them to their community issues in the ongoing development of their own "super-initiatives." We referred to subsequent semester work as a mini "apprenticeship" in the field, revolving around both community psychology analyses of their chosen problem and development of a hypothetical action plan for that same problem (see O'Sullivan, 1997 for a similar initiative). Final proposals were shared with classmates during poster sessions in the final week of class (see #6 below).

The most positive theme of student evaluation referred to the combined effect of these initial aspects (1-5). Students reported that the course "encouraged me to develop my ideas and approaches to problems" (72%) and "encouraged me to think for myself" (73%). Two students commented that "[the class has] taught me to look at an issue and not just look at one side, but to draw up both sides of an issue and really interpret them." "I really liked that the focus was on all perspectives rather than one; I feel that's what made this class really unique." Other students noted that "the sketchpad helped me to discover my ideas in greater depth" and "I appreciated the freedom given me to form my own ideas," with 64%

recommending we keep the sketchpad. Students spoke of these super-initiative projects as "grounding" concepts and teaching the "application of concepts of class in a real way."

Other students had difficulty with these aspects. For the sketchpad, some struggled with moving beyond verbatim notes to explore their own reflections, while others who were capable, disliked being asked to do so. Barkham and Elender (1995) also reported divided student evaluations on their "dossiers," with half the class relishing the opportunity to think more for themselves and half anxious about the looseness of expectations. A vocal handful of our own students strongly resisted the fundamental class approach, with one student criticizing the class as a "community philosophy" course rather than "one centered on solid psychological findings." This important posting to our anonymous course message board prompted a class discussion on values and interpretation within social science (see the elaborated exploration of these questions in the *AJCP* special issue on community psychology and science, including those of the first author and a mentor, Rappaport, 2005 & Hess, 2005).

B. Fostering authentic connection and exchange within the classroom community

Another classic difficulty of large classes is lack of engagement with a "live" person, prompting attention over the years as to how to foster more interaction within such a course (e.g., Benjamin, 1991; Cooper, 1995). This second thrust of our initiative comprises attempts to maximize actual exchange within the class.

(6) Research-action teams and class poster sessions: Preserving live exchange between students. As noted previously, students focusing on similar community issues were organized in small groups we called "research action teams." To extend class-time exchange, discussion boards were created for each team on the class website; these were also made available to the larger class as well, with encouragement to "sit in" on other team discussions and offer your "consultation" on other issues of interest. These teams functioned as supportive containers to facilitate mutual exploration of an issue and eventually collaborate on associated super-initiatives. Group problem-solving (Lehman, 1997), "cooperative group work" (Raffini, 1988) and

Intro to Community Psychology Class Poster Session, University of Illinois, Spring 2006

"collaborative learning" (Cooper, 1995; Rinehart, 1999) have each been proposed as particularly effective ways to prompt student engagement, especially when centered around issues of real-world significance (Hevern, 1996). Most of our own students (88%) reported positively on their experience with the research action team: "The environment in this class definitely felt like a smaller class . . . splitting the class into groups based on interests made the class seem personalized for each student." "I loved the active participation aspect of the course. I learned so much from others and was given the ability to share about myself," "I felt like I could openly share my views in class." "There is no sharing in my other large classes, no discussion only lecture." In addition to learning from multiple viewpoints within their own team, students commented specifically that small group interaction facilitated deeper learning about the field and prompted more friendship and connection within the class community. Other students felt differently and either called for more in-class discussion or suggested the nature of a large classroom necessitated a more traditional format: "Large classes work better when it is just lecture. That's just the way it is."

 While there were generally limitations to verbal participation within whole-class discussions, we found two notable exceptions. The first was "community wisdom" sharing (see below), and the second was class poster sessions held during the last week of class in the atrium of our psychology building. Over two days, student groups took turns presenting conclusions from

semester-long problem definition analyses and "super-initiatives" for their community issues, giving them a final chance to put everything they learned about their issue relative to community psychology together in one presentation. Complete with professional attire and hors d'oeuvres, this was a fun way for students to share what had been learned with their other classmates. 85% of students responded favorably to the poster session—many enthusiastically: "Exciting end to semester. . . Fun, more expression and freedom than say a boring paper!" Students commented on the chance to see other classmates ideas: "I loved it! It was great to see other people's work…It's neat to see what everyone else has been doing all semester…" One student noted that sharing individual ideas "helped me to realize that my ideas are possible."

 In spite of these successes, our primary expectation for student participation, as previously noted, remained individual's own writing. We emphasize this point because of the subtle, but significant effect we believe it had on overall engagement across students. "Class participation" is often assumed by students to mean verbal sharing in class. Given this definition, students in a large course may logically assume their participation will be necessarily constrained since in-class sharing (even in small groups) is so naturally limited. In contrast, by emphasizing personal exploration as primary, we attempted to shift the focus of student expectations towards a broadened definition of "participation," one arguably more fitting to a large course. In this way, even when

not able to directly share a great deal during class, we believe students may come to feel themselves genuine and full participants in and through their own personal exploration.

(7) "Community wisdom" sharing: Preserving personal connection within a large class. Second to the small groups, our most effective attempt to facilitate in-class connections was inspired by community psychology's traditional focus on the 'expertise' of normal citizens. While the course clearly offered new insights in the study of communities, we began the semester with an acknowledgment that each student already brought a background with long years of their own experience in communities. In order to tap into this collective "community wisdom" of the class, we consequently challenged each student to choose a story from past community experience that could be shared in class. "Community wisdom" came to be a fixture of each week, with stories ranging from the positive and uplifting to the painful and difficult, as well as light-hearted humorous experiences. 85% of student evaluations showed positive feedback for community wisdom: "Community stories ROCK!", "I LOVED this!", "Best part of class," "DEFINITELY KEEP, this was awesome." Students spoke of the sharing as a great way to both put themselves into the class personally and connect with each other on a more personal level. Students spoke of this activity as making the atmosphere "feel so much more personal," as stories "[brought] us all closer."

C. *Maintaining effective accountability while avoiding manipulation*

While the foregoing aspects helped facilitate personal engagement and collective connection, a final major challenge involved how to approach class accountability. Indeed, while the potential of efforts described above seemed clear, we believed their impact would depend on students actually having enough freedom and space to explore within the class. Raffini (1993) cites Lepper's minimal-sufficiency principle to argue for "minimally sufficient control" in a classroom, with the amount of external reinforcement as small as possible. In light of this, we experimented with various ways of ensuring course accountability without coercion and unnecessary limits on freedom; we did so, in particular, by revising course aspects typically

used to mandate participation, including required attendance (8), deadlines (9) and heavy exams (10). By decreasing the extent of structural constraints associated with assignments, attendance, and evaluation, we aimed to permit students more flexibility to make their own choices.

(8) Noticing student presence: Finding a non-mandatory, but effective attendance policy. Over the four semesters, attendance policies varied widely as we struggled to find a system that did not feel manipulative of our students. After trying out participation points, we experimented with omitting these from the grading process in varying degrees. While not requiring attendance, we emphasized that as a college course, our expectation was that students attend class. Rather than omitting attendance altogether, however, we still took roll each day by having students "sign in" on alphabetized rolls at the back of class as they entered. This was done, as we explained, to assist us in tracking how each student was doing in the course individually, and was unattached to any formal evaluation. In subsequent teacher planning meetings, these records proved extremely helpful in flagging students who had not been attending for several weeks. This allowed us to focus energies checking in on the students who potentially needed it the most.

While general tracking was our primary motivation for keeping attendance, the act of signing in to class also conveyed to students that their presence/absence was important and noticed by us. We believe this attendance policy contributed in a subtle, but significant way, to a more open and comfortable atmosphere than is typically possible in a gathering mandated by reward or threat of penalty.

Indeed, rather than "forcing students to come," we found this attendance policy forced *us* as teachers to better prepare discussion/ activities which would nurture implicit motivation to attend. Overall, student feedback suggested that this approach succeeded in reinforcing the importance of class without manipulating attendance and while treating individuals with the dignity of adult relationships: "I liked it. I didn't feel

compelled to come to class, but I liked being able to come on my own." "I came to class because I wanted to, not because I had to." Students commented on their capacity to appreciate natural consequences and manage themselves: "if you miss class, you miss info and that is your penalty" "I felt that we were responsible for ourselves… and I liked that."

(9) "Implicit deadlines": Testing alternative timetables for assignments. A second standard way of structuring student participation is deadlines. We experimented with both successful and unsuccessful ways of removing the forced feel of deadlines. Our most successful attempt came in the final semester. With the exception of two major explicit deadlines—midterm and final evaluations—we did not require that written work be completed at a specific time point. In the meantime, we encouraged students to keep up their work, aiming for completion in the time that made sense in the flow of the course. We called these "implicit deadlines."

Surprisingly, students were split in their evaluations, with both strongly positive and negative responses. A good number of students found the freedom and flexibility helpful: "Lack of structure was beneficial because I was not scolded like a child to get assignments done, but expected as an adult to get them done at my discretion." Others noted, "They treated us as adults, as equals"; "I felt the flexible due dates were an advantage because it let me work around my schedule"; and "[They allowed me to] put my best work in at the best time for me."

Other students, however, found the freedom unhelpful and frustrating in different ways: "because of fairly lenient assignment deadlines it was easy to let other things take up my time"; "Since there were no deadlines and no 'turning in' it was hard for me to get motivated to do them"; "[It was] a bit frustrating, I won't do work unless I have a deadline." Overall, the mixed feedback would suggest additional revisions to this aspect of structural change. Some suggested, for instance, retaining more generalized due date "ranges" to help students keep pace, while still keeping specific deadlines flexible.

(10) Alternative accountability structure: Restructuring evaluation (without killing the

teachers!). A final contribution to greater space in our classroom involved the structural aspect perhaps most typically responsible for compulsion in courses: the evaluation system. While clearly an essential part of an effective class, we aimed to avoid "using" the evaluations as a way to manipulate behavior (and distract from learning). Instead, over the two years, one of our most intensive explorations was seeking ways to structure course accountability in a way that directly promoted and extended learning.

As a start, we consistently reinforced the "law of the harvest" message that any student doing their very best to meet class expectations will do well in class. By making it clear that theoretically "everyone could get an A," we sought to address both the collective sense of competition and the personal impulse to obsess over grades. Given our emphasis on open exploration, examinations likewise centered on student reflection in a flexible way, with students challenged to focus on understanding the 'broad brushstrokes' of the field. For instance, one of the final exam questions read:

Imagine yourself in a future professional intervention role (doctor, case-manager, social worker, teacher) addressing a community issue of your choice. In this scenario, illustrate what an empowering intervention would look like as compared to an intervention that wouldn't necessary facilitate empowerment. As you do so, make sure to use specific examples of actions that reflect your understanding of the distinctions between empowering versus more traditional ways of intervening as a professional.

Students were typically satisfied with the nature of the final exam, which appeared to legitimately differentiate students based on their respective effort. Those students who had not seriously engaged in the class reflected this in their exams and vice versa.

Our use of qualitative evaluation across both assignments and examinations raises a subtle, but significant issue which threatened

to derail our attempts in serious ways: *time.* Any conscientious teacher can testify to the way any class can soak up time "like a black hole." We quickly learned how grading could demand the bulk of our time—especially in a course of 120 students with writing as our primary medium of accountability. In early semesters, as we sought to give frequent individual feedback, the burden was especially heavy and we had little time to invest in other areas.

Initially out of literal weariness, we first began to question whether grading itself *should be* the main focus of our teaching time. Considering the well-being of our students, was grading truly the most effective use of the time we had available for our class? As we began questioning the dominance of grading in our role, we were led to other questions. While individual feedback on papers could clearly be helpful, from our own experience as graduate students we also knew that powerful learning often came from the writing process itself. Was it necessary for teachers to respond to everything students had written? While still attempting to read student work, we began to experiment with supplemental evaluation formats.

First, we began to leverage the natural accountability of the class community itself by inviting students to share their work with members of their research-action teams through online discussion boards. "Publishing" writing to one's group and offering feedback to classmates became a formal part of individual writing assignments. In order to supervise and support the process, we divided the 20 research-action teams and each began "sitting in" on discussion board exchanges. While sometimes chiming in with reflections and further questions, we just as often watched the groups do this by themselves. This allowed us to begin shifting our time investment from evaluative individual feedback to the facilitation of group learning.

As teachers, we enjoyed the way this shift prompted more of an advisory and mentoring role on our part in students' own explorations (see Jacobi, 1991). In their similar large course format changes, Barkham and Elender (1995) also spoke of redirecting time away from typical class preparations towards the active support of individual students. In addition to reinforcing more control over their learning, this shift invited students to rely less exclusively on our own evaluations of work and increasingly look to others' feedback as well—both classmates and their own. The benefits of peer group feedback and assessment have been recognized in the literature, including increased levels of empowerment, self-reliance, genuine exploration of the material, complex thinking, and critical analysis (Burkill, 1997; Stanier, 1997; Strachan & Wilcox, 1996; White, 2002)

Beyond peer input, we experimented with a second layer of supplemental evaluation by leveraging students' own self-assessments as one component of course accountability. On different occasions, we would ask students to rate and describe their own effort and performance in a variety of domains. While frequently used in graduate school as a helpful contribution to a more comprehensive evaluation, the use of self-evaluation among undergraduates is less common. Self-evaluation has been noted as particularly helpful for the way it increases active participation and autonomy among undergraduates (Jenkins, 1994; Taras, 2002).

A key concern across settings, of course, is to what degree individuals may be trusted to honestly self-evaluate. Our overall assumption was that undergraduates were not inherently less capable than graduate students in productive and honest self-evaluation. However, we sought to face the validity issue in several ways. In presenting the exercise, we emphasized that a) self-ratings were *one part* of our overall evaluation and b) we reserved the right to adjust them. To enable this, students temporarily turned in other actual class material (sketchpad/portfolio) with their self-evaluations, providing a rough gauge of their overall accuracy and a viable 'audit' of general honesty. Where self-report ratings corresponded to the general quality of their sketchpad, we accepted these judgments. In the cases, however, where ratings were in obvious contrast to either shoddy or outstanding writing, we gave more intensive investigation, leading in some cases to an adjustment of some kind (both up and down). Based on these audits, we found that a large majority of students offered fair reflections of their own performance. The willingness of

individuals to rate themselves down was at times surprising, e.g., "I really don't deserve more than a B based on my work so far."

Like peer-evaluation, self-assessments became a helpful supplement to our evaluation efforts and helped decrease the overall grading burden. Encouraging students to look to their own judgments in defining the quality of their work reinforced their role as a meaningful part of their own accountability system. Most students commented on the process as generally fair and personally helpful in their ongoing learning in the course, with 79% reporting favorably on the overall grading process in final student evaluations and 83% recommending keeping self-evaluation as one component of grading. Other students, however, had strong negative reactions to the idea of evaluating themselves and saw it as "too subjective" or an unnecessary waste of time, even a "cop-out" by teachers on their exclusive responsibility.

Across these efforts, we saw a cumulative effect of grading decisions no longer occupying the bulk of our time as teachers. This led to one of the most significant benefits of the course structure. Namely, rather than be preoccupied and consumed with evaluation, we found plentiful time to "learn with" the students, from discussion board participation to personal meetings with individuals and groups. Especially rewarding was finding the time to connect with our students having the most difficulty. With the help of attendance records, we targeted struggling students for personal e-mail contact in which we asked how we could be supportive and invited one-on-one meetings. Across the semesters, we were able to be responsive to a variety of personal difficulties interfering with class, including ongoing family struggles and recent deaths. These students frequently expressed surprise and gratitude for the personal attention. Freeing up time to focus on those needing us the most became an enormous benefit of the evaluation shift in particular, and one of the highlights of the whole course.

Overall evaluations of learning atmosphere: Variable experiences of course flexibility

After reviewing specific outcomes of efforts to facilitate student choice, thinking and sharing in earlier sections, this section explores feedback on both the foregoing accountability

revisions and the overall atmosphere of the class. While we received a range of feedback, as with other areas, comments in these reports were sharply divergent.

On one hand, a majority of students reported that the "atmosphere was conducive to learning," with the environment consistently described as "low-stress, relaxed, self-paced, not focused on grades" etc. The specific approach to deadlines and evaluations was reported by many as having a positive effect on the environment, with grading resituated as secondary to learning itself. While our grade distribution admittedly disobeyed the bell curve (consistent with assumptions reviewed previously), we believe the real possibility of good grades for all had a tangible, positive impact on competition and overall sense of community in the class. Even so, a number of students still avoided the effort necessary for an A.

On the other hand, a segment of students expressed concerns with the atmosphere. We found that those who disliked the course format generally expressed strong feelings and even open hostility about different aspects. Some wanted to be given more "facts" about communities, rather than exploring different views and writing about their own. Others felt offended by being asked to participate in the evaluation process. The most consistent comment from across students, however, was a request for more structure. In contrast to those who felt refreshed by more space, these students reported uncertainty about expectations and a feeling of disorganization: "sometimes hard to understand exactly what was being asked for"; "I often got stressed because I wasn't sure what was expected." For these students, our approach to deadlines and evaluations seemed to prompt more, rather than less stress in their experience.

Making sense of this divergence proved to be a major challenge of our evaluation especially since different students appeared to be experiencing the same course aspect in diverging ways (see discussion section). What was received as refreshing "flexibility" by some students was experienced by others as an uncomfortable "lack of structure." Two

students reported experiencing the freedom as both "helpful and frustrating (at times)." "It was both, at times good and others difficult."

In order to deepen our evaluation in the final semester, we investigated the reasons why students dropped the course. Out of 196 students signed up for the class at one time or another, 130 stayed in the course and 67 dropped at some point. At the end of the semester, we e-mailed all students who had dropped and received ten responses. Four of the ten students reported dropping the course before the semester began due to schedule changes. Three other students mentioned the early hour of the class making it difficult to attend. Four students, however, spoke of concerns that the class would be "way more involved than I was accustomed to … definitely not what I was expecting." Dissonance with expectations of creativity, self-exploration and group collaboration in the course were all specifically mentioned, alongside some concern that it would be busy-work. Four students reported expecting a lighter class, especially during busy senior years. "I did not want to have any further responsibilities than a few tests and quizzes." While for any given course there are typically many students who drop for different reasons, we believe these kinds of concerns contributed to a higher than normal drop rate in our own course.

Discussion: Ongoing questions and challenges

In the end, we propose that there is reason to be optimistic at the potential of large courses to become more empowering, dialogic spaces. While different in meaningful ways from smaller courses, it appears they need not be *fundamentally different* in their overall atmosphere. In a variety of ways, teachers of large courses may craft class structures that nurture critical thought and active engagement, while preserving both learning accountability and space to explore. We offer this as additional evidence for the benefits of making the undergraduate experience more similar to graduate education (Jacobi, 1991; González, 2001), suggesting that principles of self-directed learning and self-evaluation, which are acknowledged as critical for advanced community psychology training (Lykes & Hellstedt, 1987), may be potentially relevant for all students.

While the possibilities within large courses seem evident, we have remained puzzled with the striking variation in student feedback. Others experimenting with class structural changes have also experienced student resistance to greater control and freedom, in particular (e.g., Barkham & Elender, 1995; Burkill, 1997; White, 2002) and to major class innovations generally (Scott, Buchanan, & Haigh, 1997). The most obvious explanation, of course, is that our own teaching practice can continue to improve, a fact we acknowledge in welcoming additional insight and growth within future teaching roles. Since large numbers of students responded enthusiastically, however, we have also explored several other issues potentially relevant to conflicting evaluations.

The setting of the setting: Constraints of larger institutional environments

As recognized in the community psychology literature, however "alternative" a new setting may be, it is still subject to the larger surrounding context (Cherniss & Deegan, 2000). In our case, students left the course to attend multiple other classes with differing expectations (many likely demanding their efforts in more compulsory ways). Similar to children in a conflicted household, students are thus required to negotiate clashing expectations. In such a situation, the natural tendency would seem to be responding to those reinforcements that are most inflexible and urgent. Indeed, we found students commonly remarking that "because of lenient deadlines it was easy to let other things take up my time." Especially given the perpetually over-committed lifestyle typical of college students, each obligation makes separate demands on finite time already in scarce supply. In such a context, even those students particularly attracted to a class format of greater space and freedom remain beholden to many other obligations.

At a minimum, acknowledging the press of these surrounding expectations may help teachers be aware of natural limits to the "alternativeness" of one's own classroom setting, bounded as they invariably are within only one location and time period in students' lived experience. Attending more explicitly to

this interface between alternative and dominant settings, however, may also prompt better ways of interacting with these larger contexts and preserving a particular atmosphere within the alternative setting itself.

The socialization of a setting: Constraints of internalized student expectations

Beyond direct influence on immediate student experience, larger structures may be relevant through a more subtle, indirect influence over time as well: meta-lessons and socialization within dominant educational systems. For instance, habits of reliance on external reinforcement, competition with other students and expectation of teachers to deliver the answers may all be internalized by students over the years (e.g., White, 2002). As these expectations come to dominate, self-motivation may naturally become dormant and largely inaccessible. Ironically, these same disinterested students may subsequently be taken as evidence for the need of additional structural reinforcements (see Ryan, 1971).

Naturally, the degree to which this kind of past socialization has occurred is influential in how future settings are experienced. Students comfortable with more instrumental structures, for instance, may naturally be confused by a more flexible structure with fewer explicit deadlines and guidelines. Alternatively, a more open setting may be refreshing to students generally resistant from past experience, to more unilateral structures.

On one level, this points to a potential need of improving the match or "person-environment fit" (Lewin, 1951) between individuals and their class context. While this seems attractive on its surface, problems arise with specific instances. Should unmotivated students, for instance, be automatically matched with instrumental structures? Might there be benefits, at times, to a "mismatch" between person and environment?

The good news: Ongoing socialization and the potential of student growth

An alternative way of responding to varying student expectations comes from a simple recognition of the *ongoing nature* of socialization. Any given individual comes into a class setting not only with particular current habits and preferences, but also with the potential

and capacity to develop further. For this reason, we propose that it may sometimes be detrimental to wholly conform teaching practice to the immediate state of students. While certainly remaining responsive to current student needs and perceptions, teachers may also be deliberately mindful of their potential trajectory of change.

The foregoing suggests that it may be justified to provide alternative reinforcements in a class setting, *even if* they may be experienced as a clear mismatch. With students accustomed to and comfortable with traditional classroom settings, for instance, the experience of being invited to stretch in a new educational context may be uncomfortable, but ultimately positive. One student noted, "remember that even though we may like (or love) the freedom and democracy of this class, we might not necessarily be used to it." Other students commented that an early frustration with the class atmosphere eventually dissipated once they "got the hang of it" and "got used to it."

In their own assessment of conflicted student evaluations of freedom, Barkham and Elender (1995) propose that "some students had not yet come to terms with developing their own authority" (p. 193) and point to a socialized dependency among some students for teachers to tell them what to think which prevents the "development of their own locus of evaluation." They go on to cite Gibbs as proposing genuine learning as "involving a degree of disorientation and personal threat and requiring personal autonomy and responsibility from the learner" (p. 195)

While still giving careful attention to reports of discomfort, instructors may thus understand some degree of resistance as expected and even desirable at times (White, 2002)—similar to "growing pains" associated with any healthy new experience. Instructors, may consequently better appreciate that in spite of past socialization (and current inclinations) towards passivity, students may presently choose *otherwise* if given the opportunity—with greater openness to the possibility of tangible change experienced by such students over the course of one bounded class. With this realization, teachers may

deliberately format aspects of a course to facilitate a kind of reverse socialization, prompting over time more intrinsic motivation and active engagement in the learning process.

At a minimum, mindfulness of these issues may help teachers navigate the turbulence of alternative teaching approaches, avoiding quick interpretation of negative feedback and building-in realistic anticipations of natural challenges experienced by students in new learning environments. For any teacher considering this kind of a model, several additional questions may arise, including two common misconceptions and a major issue we highlight in closing.

First, it is tempting to assume such efforts are only effective for senior level students. This position acknowledges the value of educational alternatives, while largely delimiting their potential to a privileged few: advanced college students (in small courses). Based on our experience, we propose that dialogic teaching events are not inherently linked to either small courses or advanced students. Indeed, with sufficient advisement, similar efforts have been shown to work well for students across levels, including primary and secondary grades (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006).

A second misconception is that these innovations require enormous time investments. As reviewed above, we actually found this kind of a structure decreased our time burden in tangible ways. While the sheer time investment seemed to be roughly equivalent, spreading out the responsibility of knowledge engagement and evaluation allowed us to focus our own resources on advising, mentoring, and facilitating. In turn, we found these activities to be inherently more energizing and less draining!

Towards greater deliberation on collective interpretation

In closing, we return full circle to earlier problem definition analyses, in proposing that the greatest challenge of empowering courses remains pervasive and influential interpretive frameworks. From explanations for student passivity, to models of how learning takes place, these ways of thinking can exert a tangible influence over teaching practice, even beneath collective awareness. Laying aside the structural and logistical barriers to upgrading large courses,

our own experience reaffirms interpretation itself as a barrier deserving direct and sustained attention.

For this reason, we close by inviting a more thoughtful collective deliberation on fundamental assumptions associated with higher education. As roles and structures within large courses are examined critically, individual instructors may come to their own distinct alternatives in teaching practice. Slife and Williams (1995) note that for such critical thinking to be genuine, awareness of a viable alternative is necessary. By fleshing out teaching models and practices distinct from dominant approaches, we hope the foregoing exploration may be beneficial to others' critical exploration of teaching. Ultimately, we believe learning in any context can be an exciting and transformative encounter and hope our own insights may be helpful towards this end.

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Address correspondence to
Jacob Hess
email: jacobzhess@byu.net

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